

Quality standards for decision making

What they could look like

Target audience: everyone interested,
no special knowledge necessary

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Page layout: allows easy reading
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very small screens



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This text is a (slightly edited) **excerpt** from the book
'Decision making, politics and quality of life' by Edgar Hartel.

Contents
of the
PDF e-book
**Decision Making,
Politics and
Quality of Life**
by
Edgar Hartel



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Quality standards for decision making

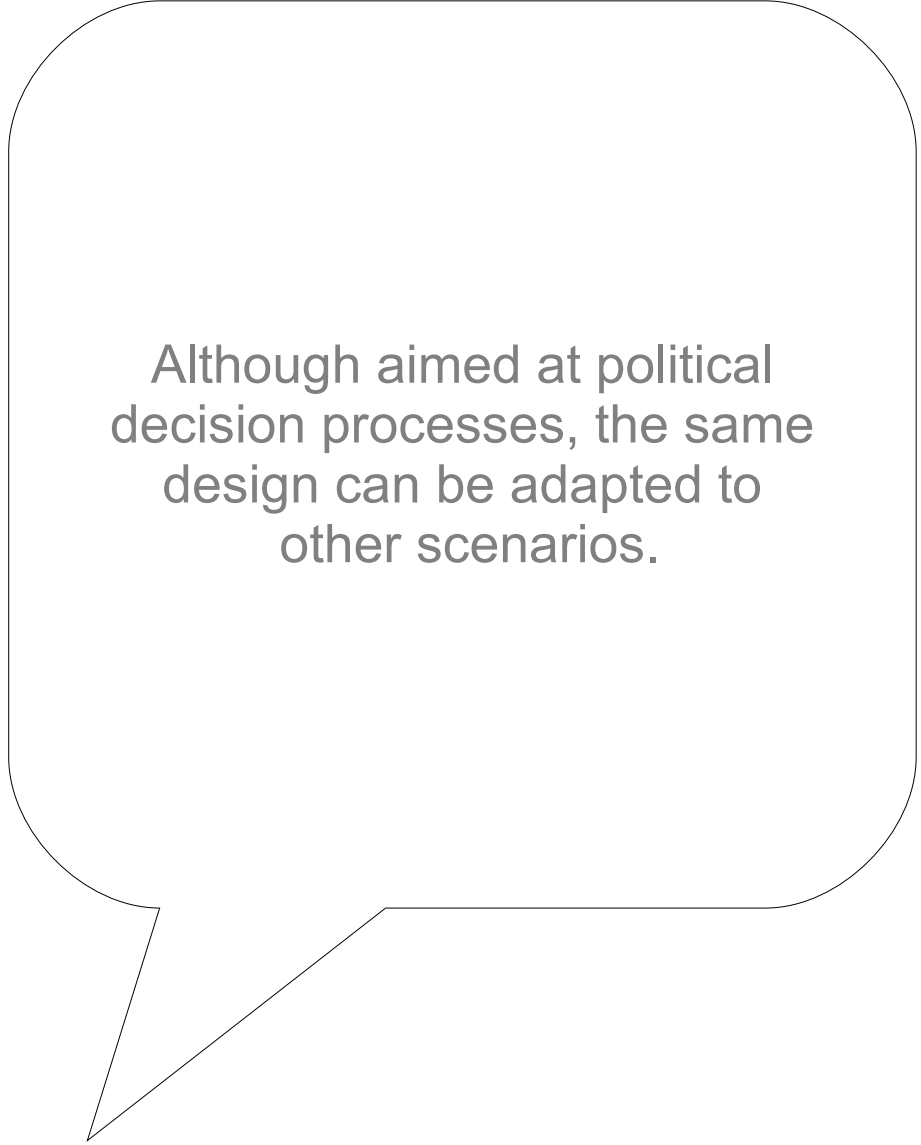
What they could look like

Estimated reading time: 20-30 minutes




This text provides
a design outline.

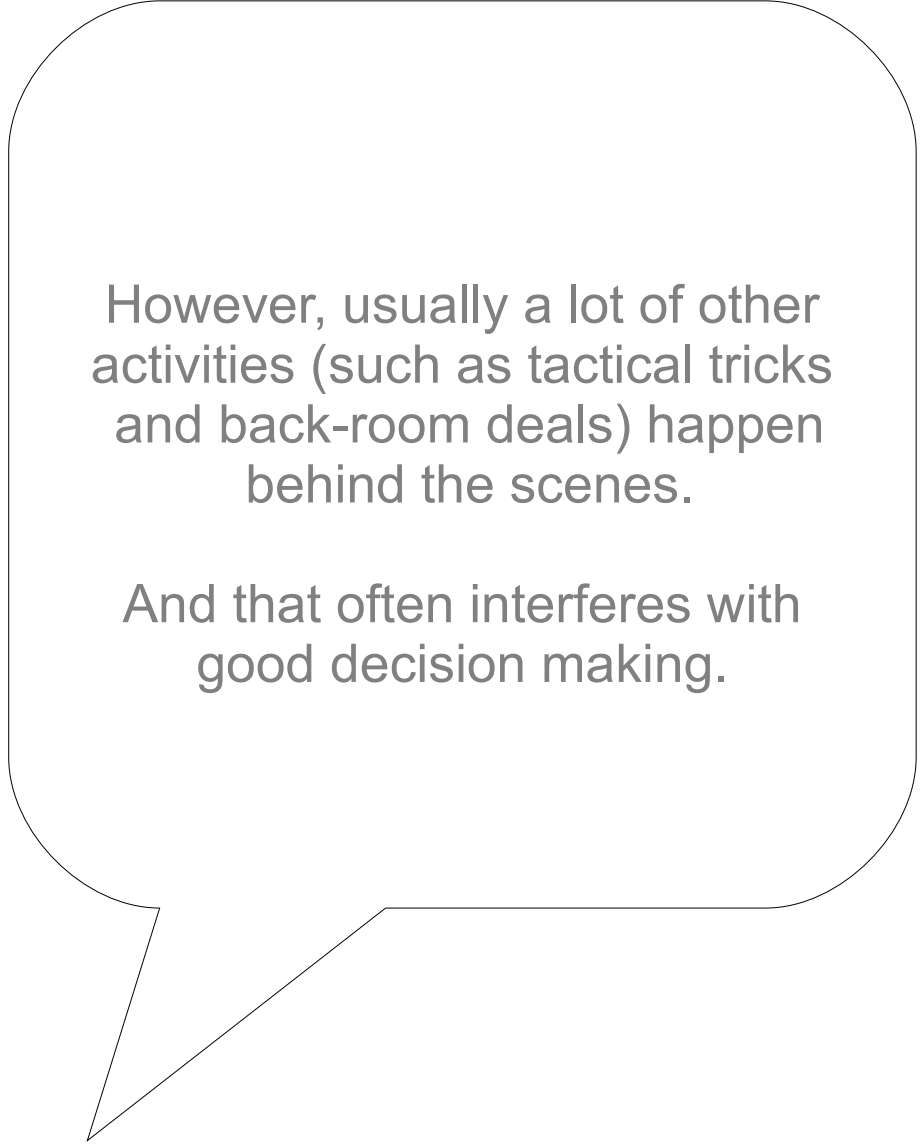
A fully detailed, ready-to-use
standard is beyond the scope
of a text with 20-30 minutes
of reading time.



Although aimed at political
decision processes, the same
design can be adapted to
other scenarios.



Many democratic countries use formalized decision making processes that also include hearings and public debate.



However, usually a lot of other activities (such as tactical tricks and back-room deals) happen behind the scenes.

And that often interferes with good decision making.

In addition, these processes tend to consume much more time (and other resources) than is desirable.

Often such delayed decisions allow the original situation to become worse during the delay.

I believe it is possible to achieve

- better **decision quality**
- better **efficiency** and
- much more **transparency**

by making changes to the process design.

Progress

Intro done

Design considerations up next
Digression into aviation
Design principles

Roles
Process

In general, a quality standard can

- A) **define properties**
a finished product must have
- B) **define a way**
how the product must be produced
- C) or both.

In this case, the 'products' are
(political) decisions.

Since they all differ from each other, a type A approach is impractical.

However, type B quality standards can be applied to decision making.

The **specific purpose** of such a quality standard is to prevent hindering factors from dominating the decision process.

Therefore the quality standard must ensure that **all hindering factors are counteracted, without making the process slow and inefficient.**

This is quite a challenge.

In principle, it is not too difficult to come up with lean procedures and checklists that work well under favourable conditions.

However, safeguarding the process against all imaginable eventualities (including abuse and human errors) is difficult.

Let's see what we can learn from an existing system that does just that.

Progress

Intro done

Design considerations done
Digression into aviation up next
Design principles

Roles
Process

Passenger air traffic.

This is a system that is exceptionally successful at preventing bad outcomes (in this case, flight accidents).

Why does it work so well?

For at least 7 reasons:

1.

There is **no awareness problem**, because the need (to avoid accidents) is very, very obvious.

2.

There is a **strong motivation** for having a really good system: fear of death.

3.

Hence the necessary **resources**
are made available.
Of course it helps that influential
decision makers tend to fly often.

4.

People working with air traffic
don't improvise. There are
procedures for 'everything'.
And they must be followed.
It does not pay to violate them
(important concept).

5.

'Everything' is operated by
trained/certified personnel.

6.

'Everyone' has **clearly defined**
responsibilities.

7.

Critical components are
redundant.

Now a change of perspective:

As a passenger (even more as a charter client) **you decide** when and where to you want to travel.

With a near 100% success rate, the system makes sure you get there without accident.

So you need to know what you want, but **you need no training** in how to run air traffic operations.

Political decision processes could benefit from a similar approach:

Members of a parliament, local council or government are the ones who decide, but trained specialists 'fly' the process.

Their exact roles are clarified later on in this text.

Aircraft pilots vs. decision process pilots

Air traffic

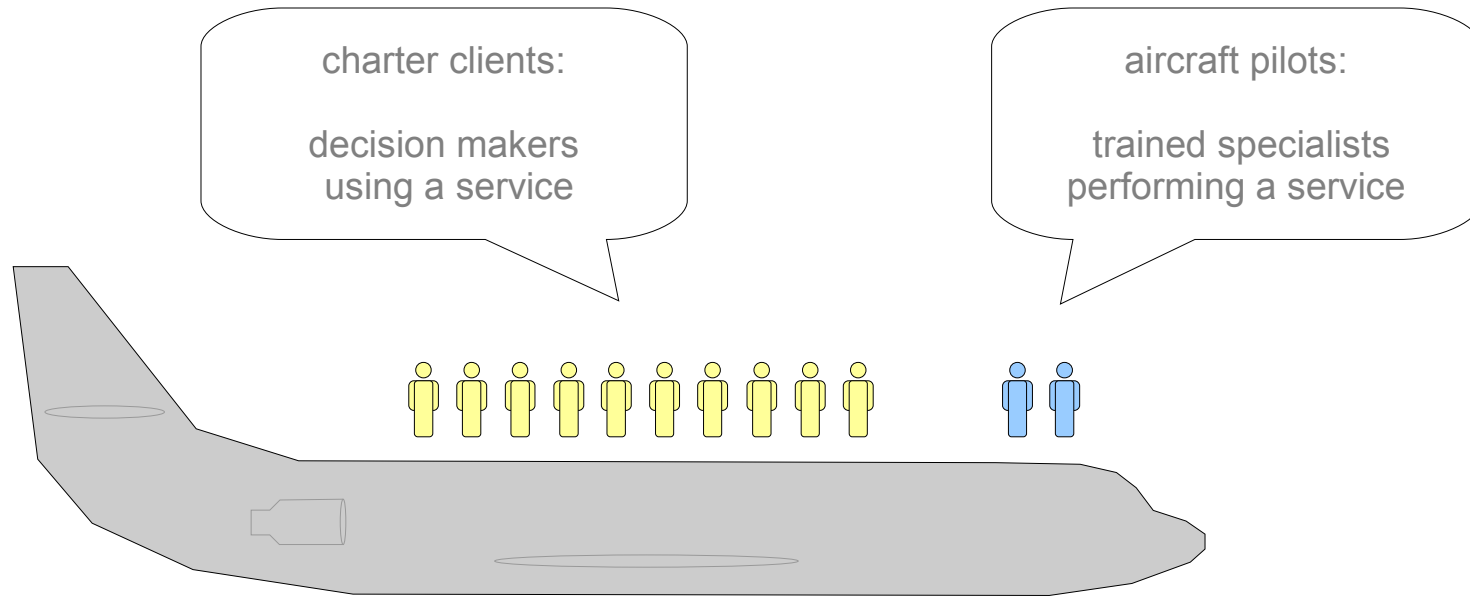


Fig. E.1a : aircraft pilots vs. decision process pilots

Aircraft pilots vs. decision process pilots

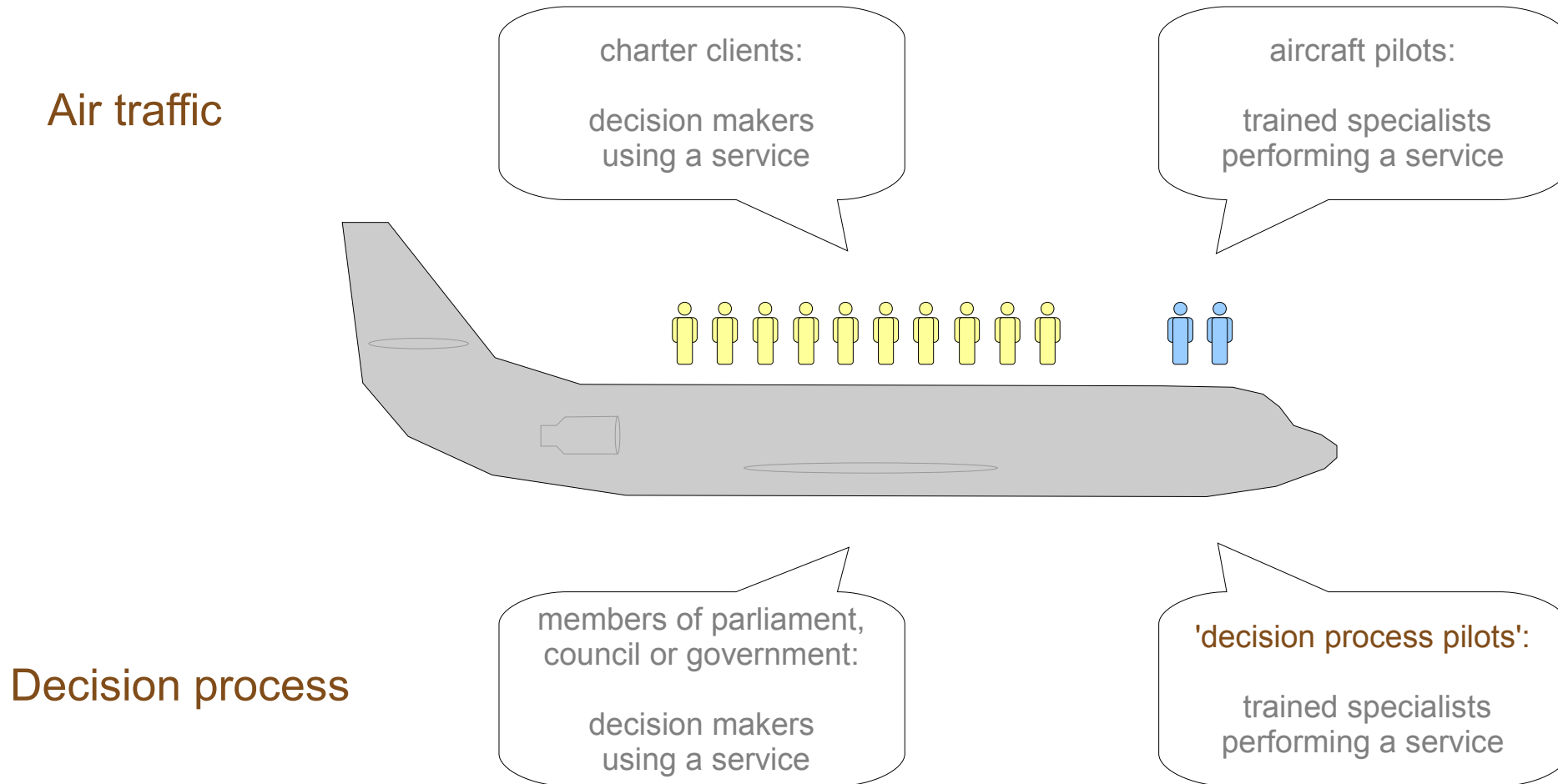


Fig. E.1b : aircraft pilots vs. decision process pilots

Progress

Intro done

Design considerations done
Digression into aviation done

Design principles up next

Roles

Process

We know already that we want:

- to prevent hindering factors from dominating the decision process
- this process to be efficient

What else is important?

1. **ease of use**: both decision makers, advisors and the public must find it easy to take part. 'Technical details' can be handled by the decision process pilots.

2. **transparency**: conducting the process in a public arena does counteract quite some hindering factors by itself, and makes both process and final decision credible.

There must be a **clear division** between public and internal arenas (which are also needed).

3. **reliability**: can be achieved using proven concepts such as procedures, checklists, formalized communication, clear responsibilities, redundancy

4. **simplicity, clarity, brevity:**

- required for 'ease of use'
- help transparency to its full potential
(free access to information becomes rather pointless if the information is incomprehensible or 'hidden' in bloated documents)
- help to achieve efficiency

5. **respect, politeness:** hard to design into a process, but nevertheless important. All participants should treat each other with respect and politeness (in addition to transparency, a rating/review function may help)

Progress

Intro	done
Design considerations	done
Digression into aviation	done
Design principles	done
Roles	up next
Process	

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

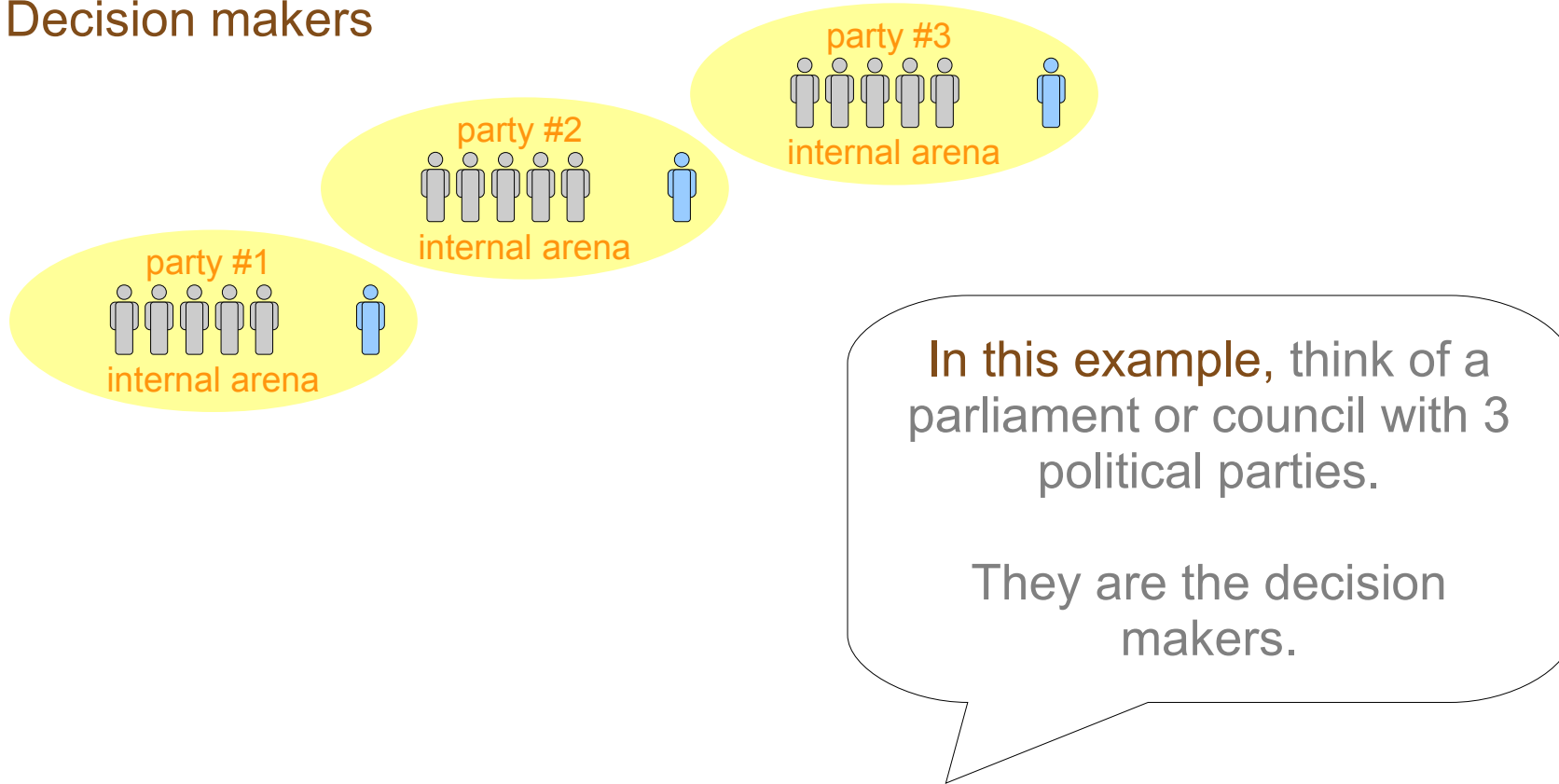


Fig. E.2a : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

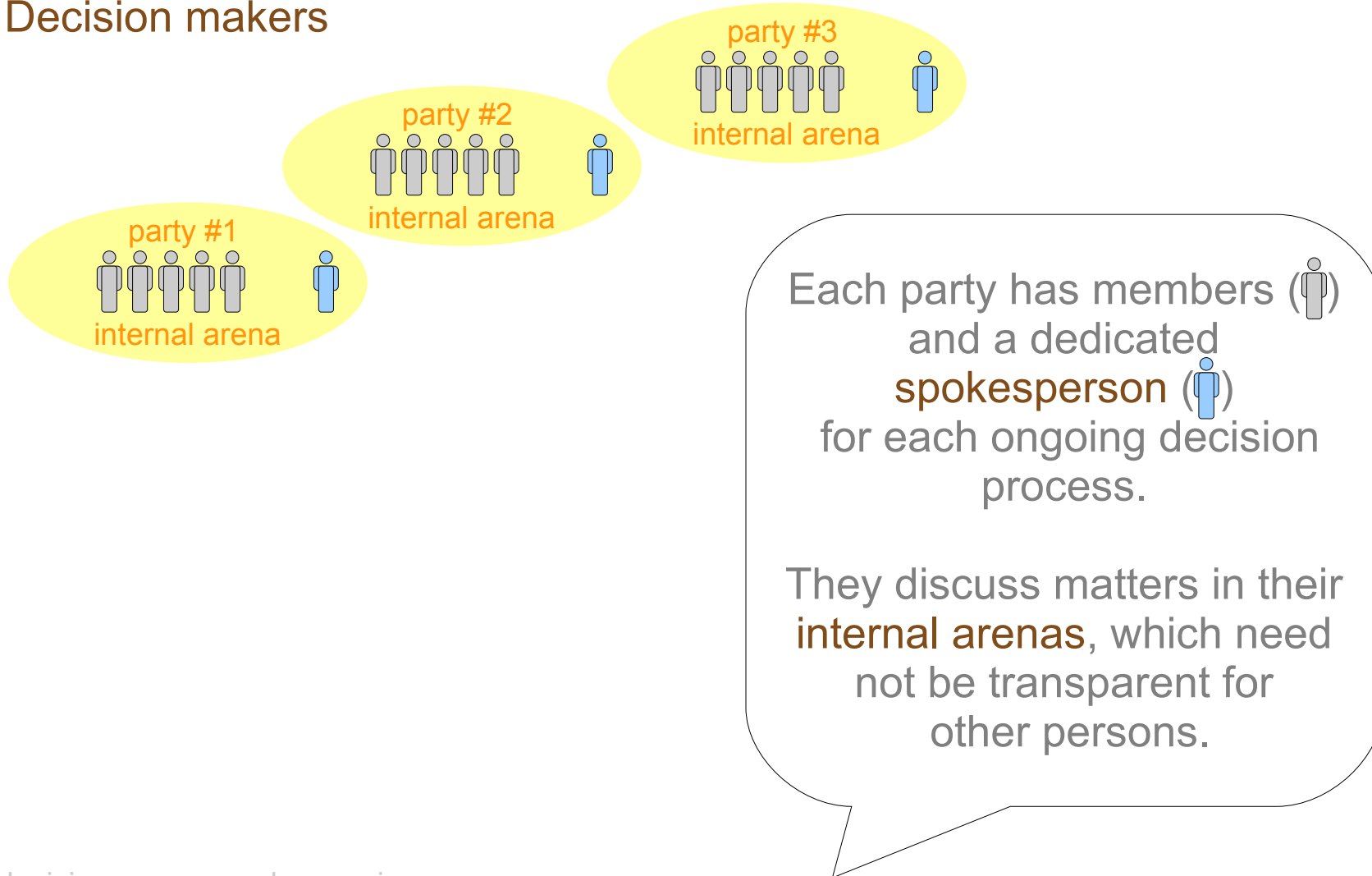
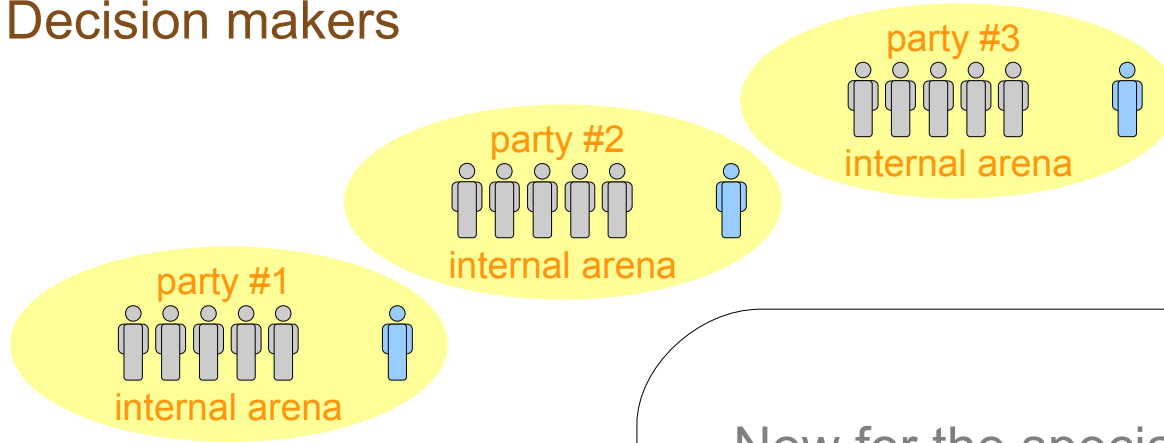


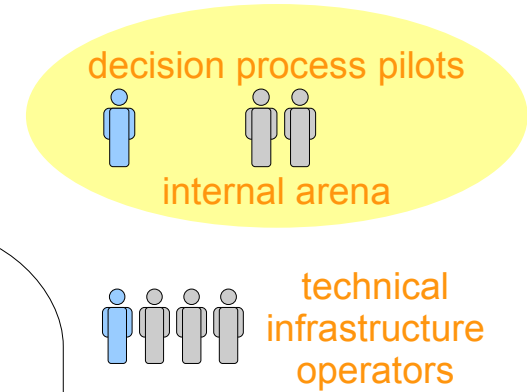
Fig. E.2b : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers



Specialists



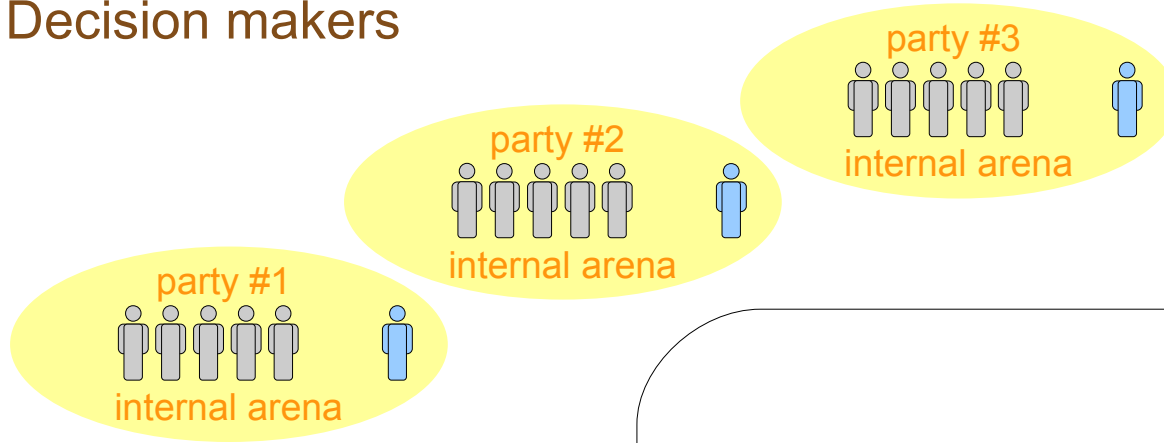
Now for the specialists:

There is one decision process pilot in charge (i).

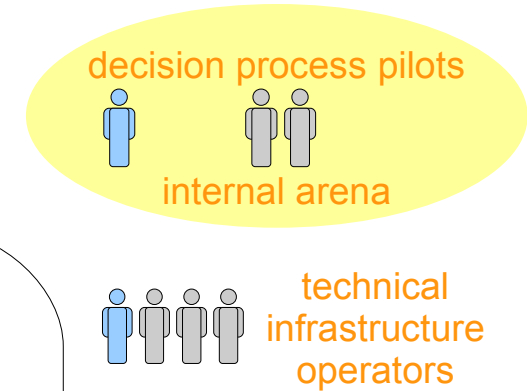
Another person (i) is in charge of the technical infrastructure.

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers



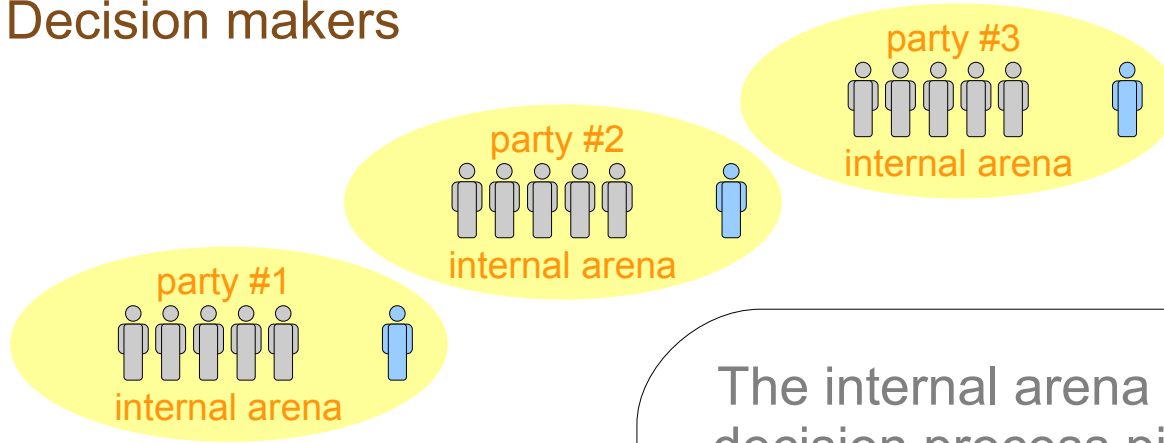
Specialists



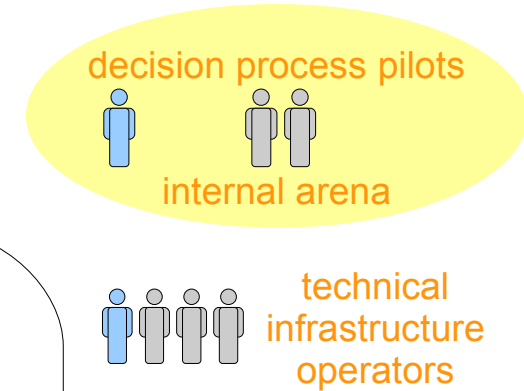
The size of the specialist teams (i) depends on the scope of the decision: group, local, regional, national, or international.

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers



Specialists

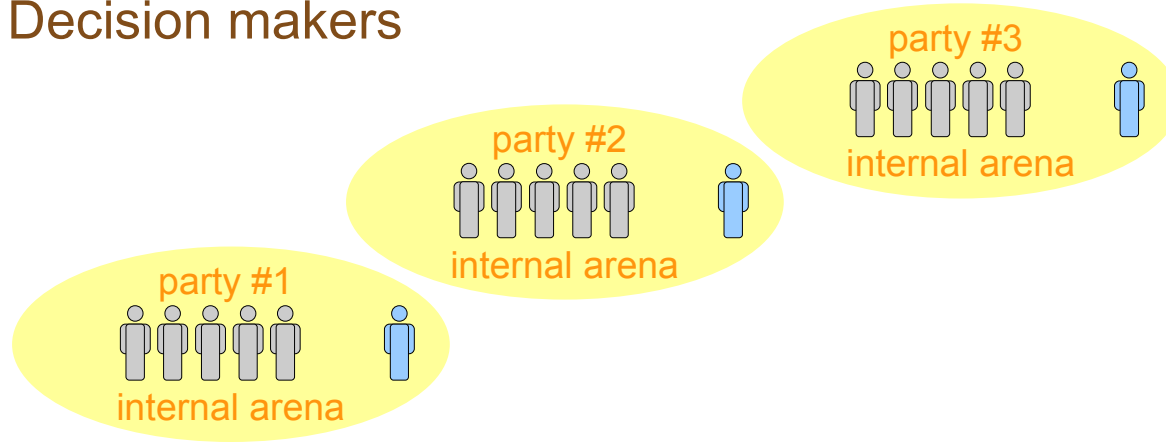


The internal arena of the decision process pilots is private to them.

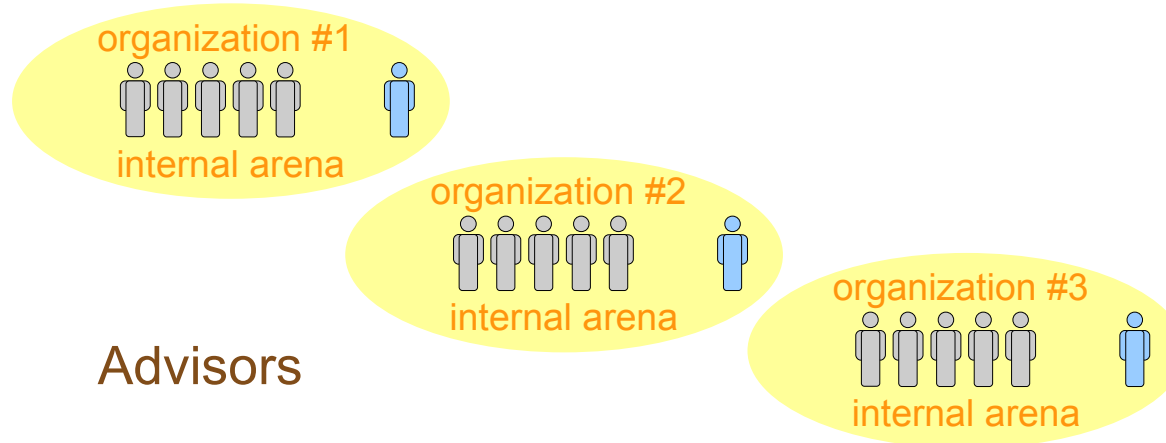
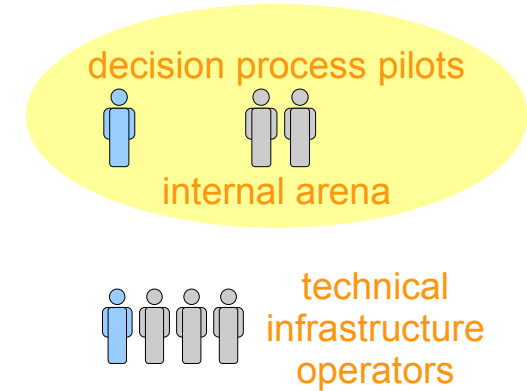
The internal arena for technical infrastructure operators is not drawn here, because their discussions are not part of the decision making process.

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers



Specialists



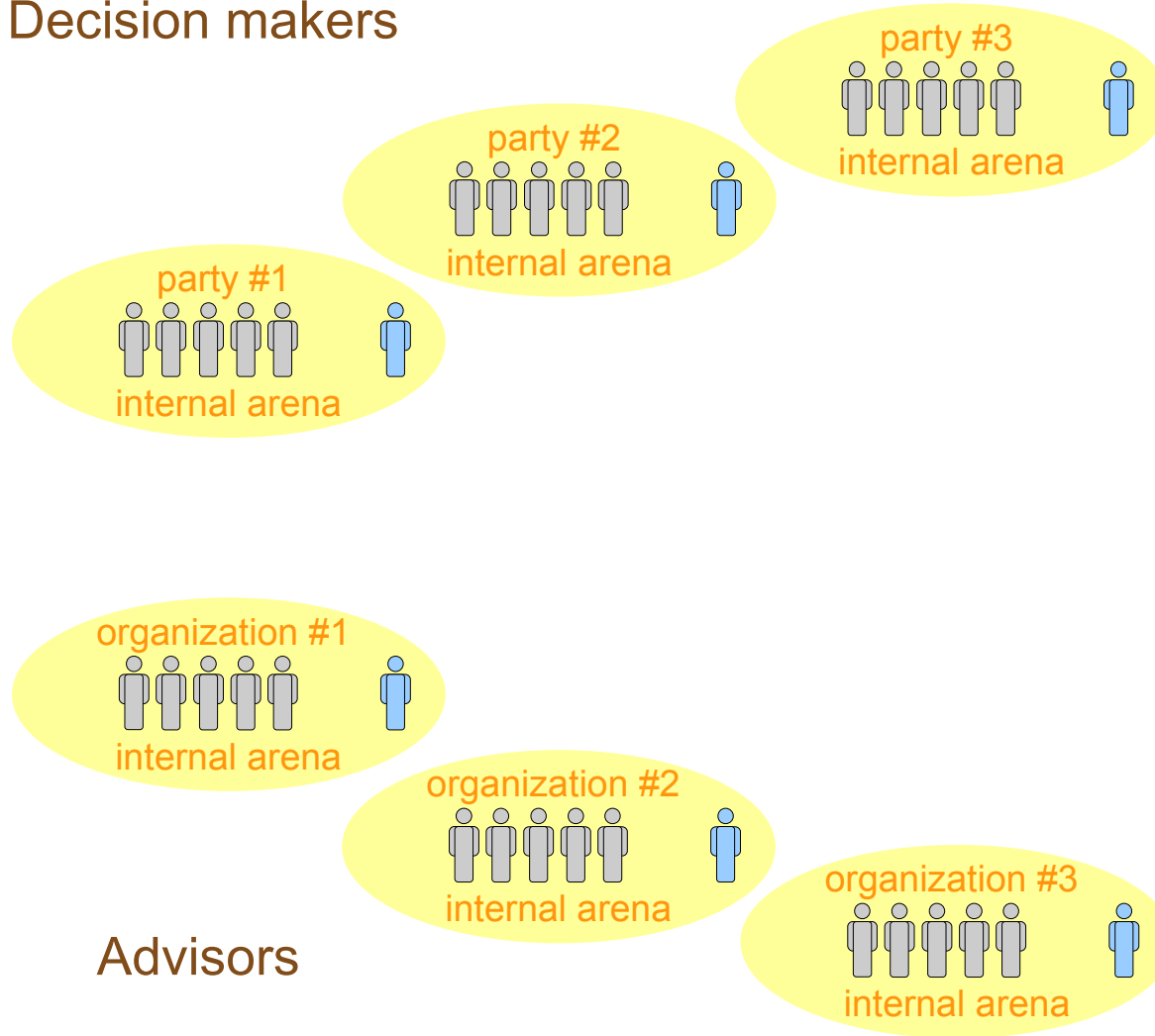
Advisors

The **advisors** are organizations (often interest groups, or expert associations) that are invited to **contribute their views** to the decision process.

Fig. E.2f : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers



Specialists

Also they need to nominate a spokesperson (👤) each.

Their internal arenas need not be transparent for other persons.

Fig. E.2g : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

Specialists

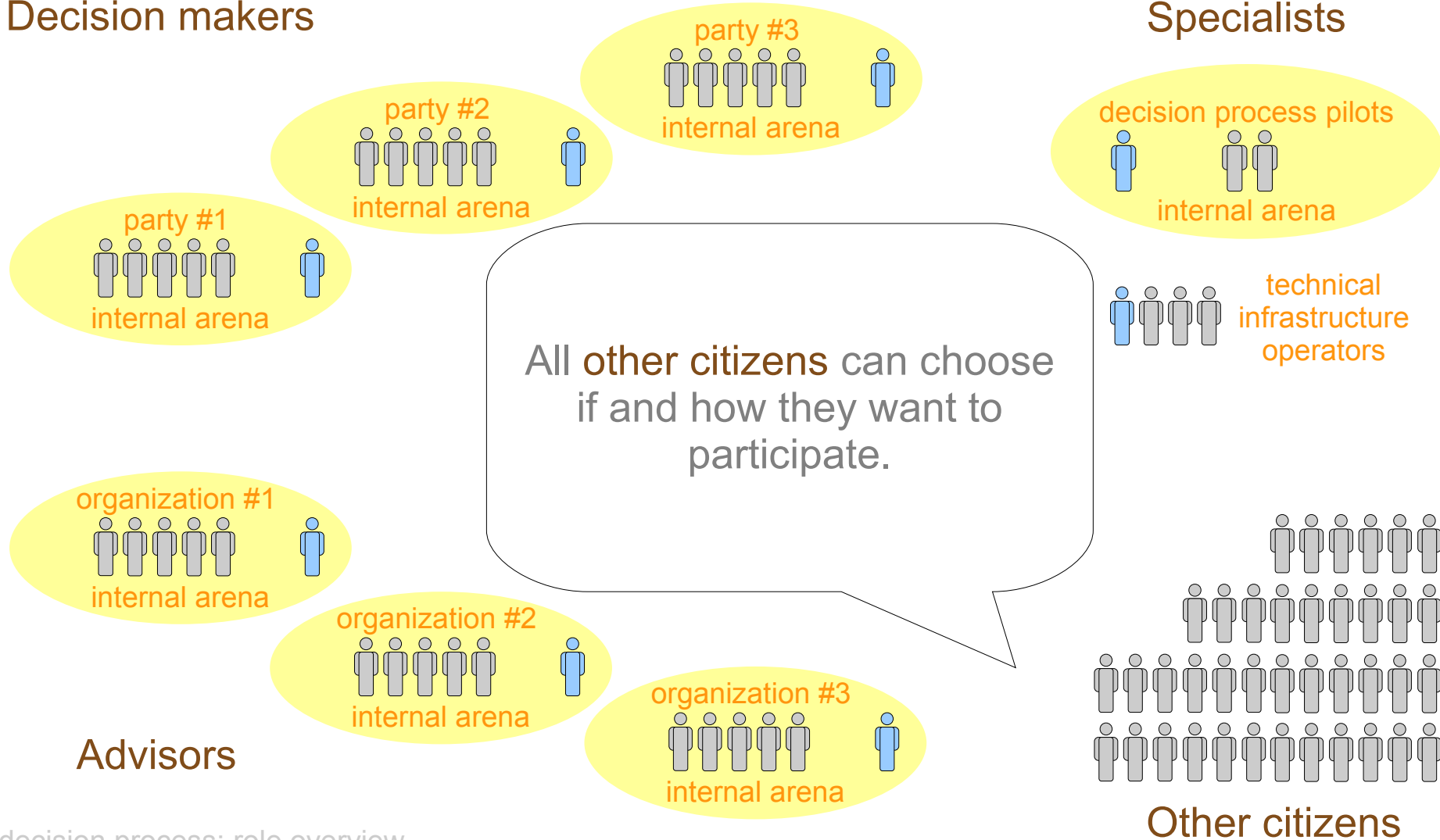


Fig. E.2h : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

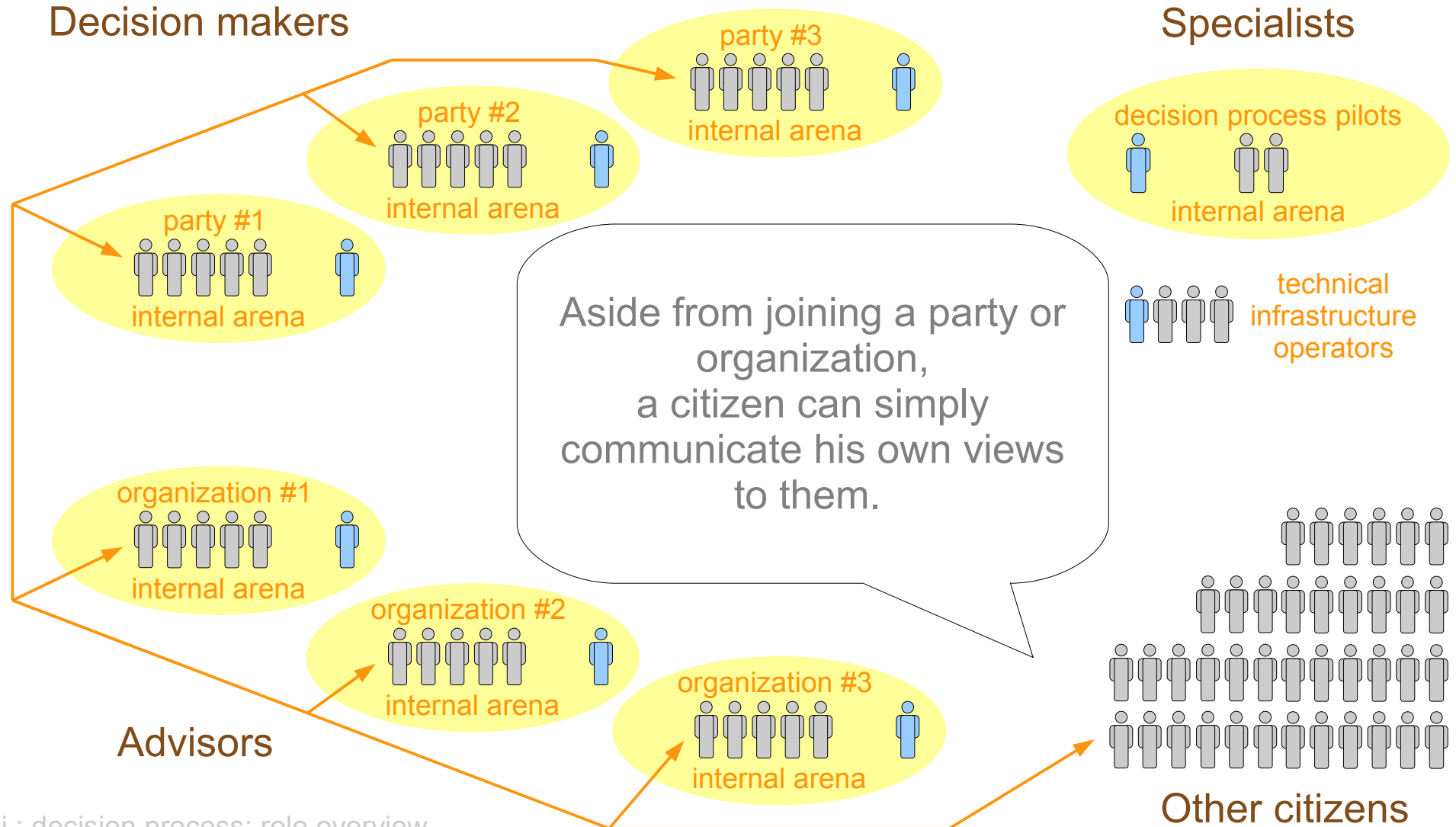


Fig. E.2i : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

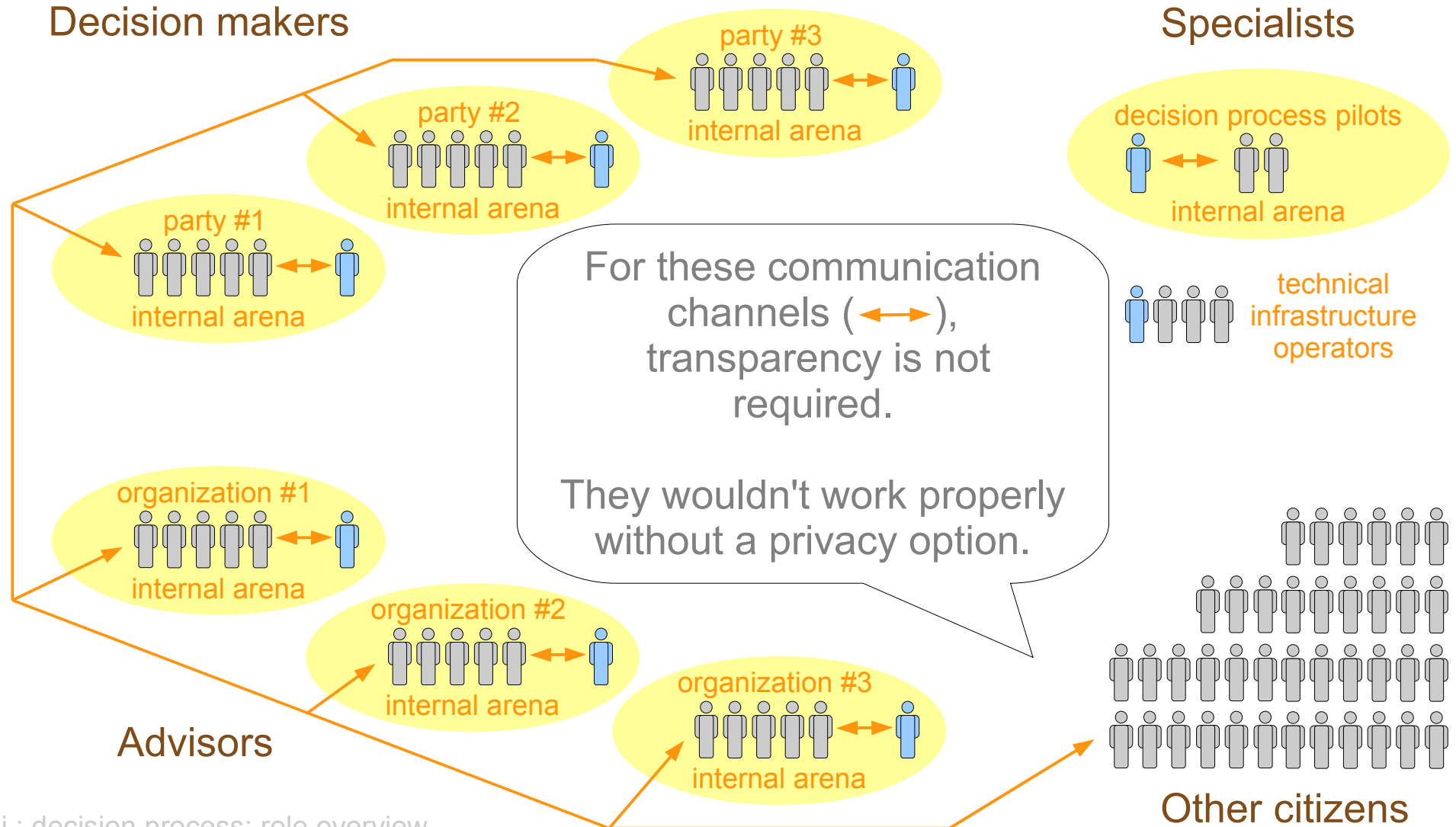


Fig. E.2j : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

Specialists

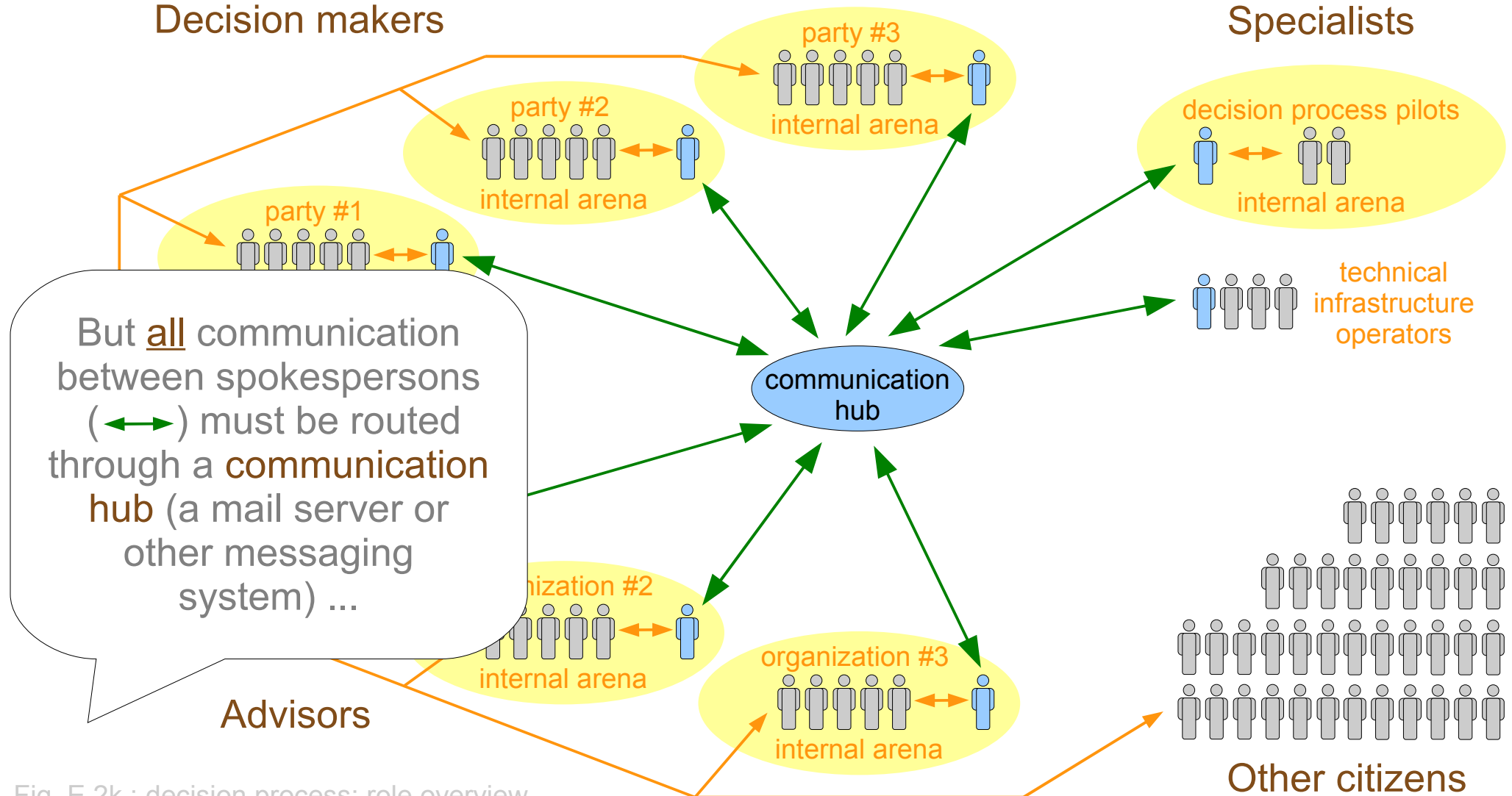


Fig. E.2k : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

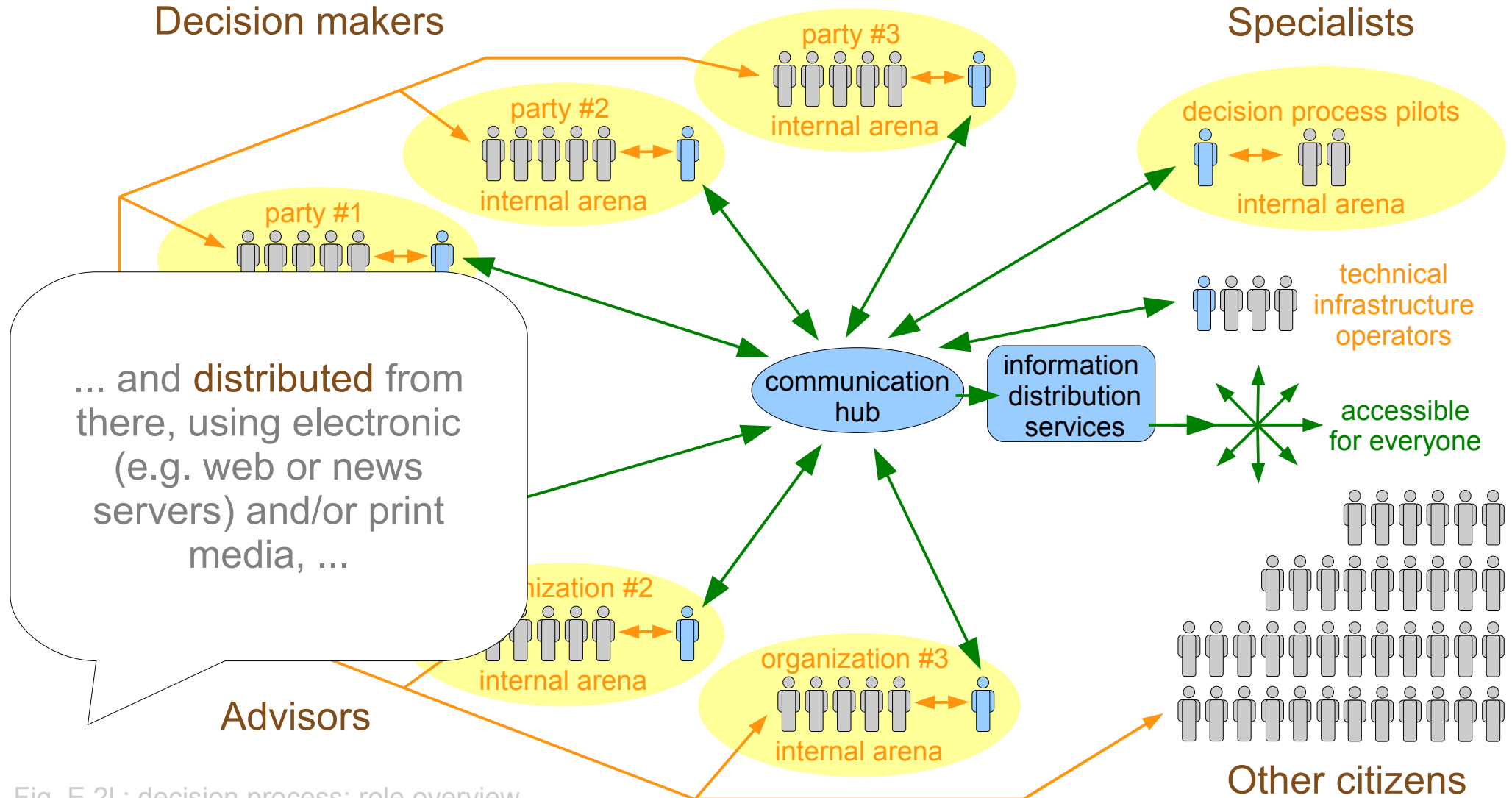
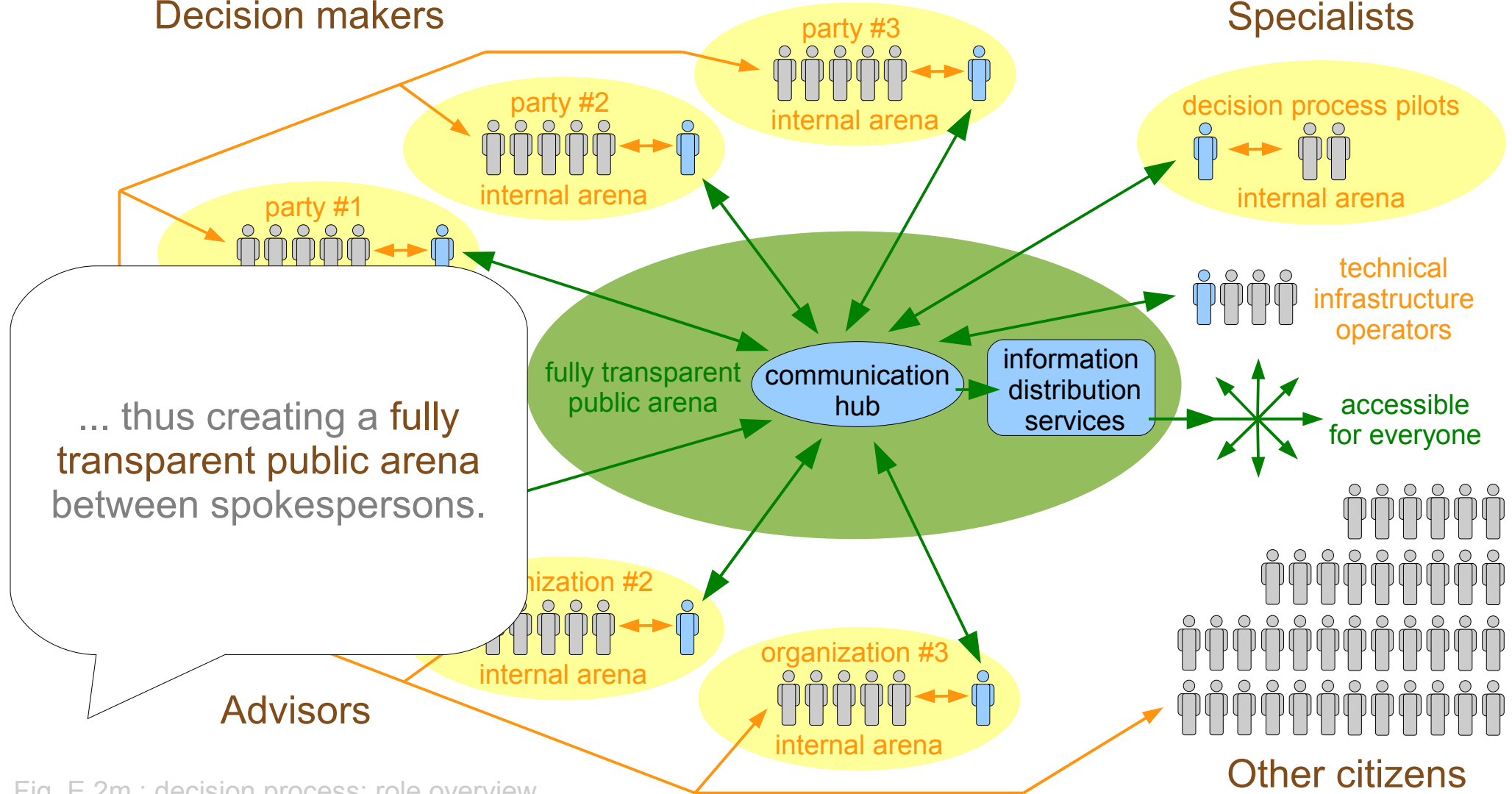


Fig. E.2I : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

Specialists



Advisors

Fig. E.2m : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

Decision makers

Specialists

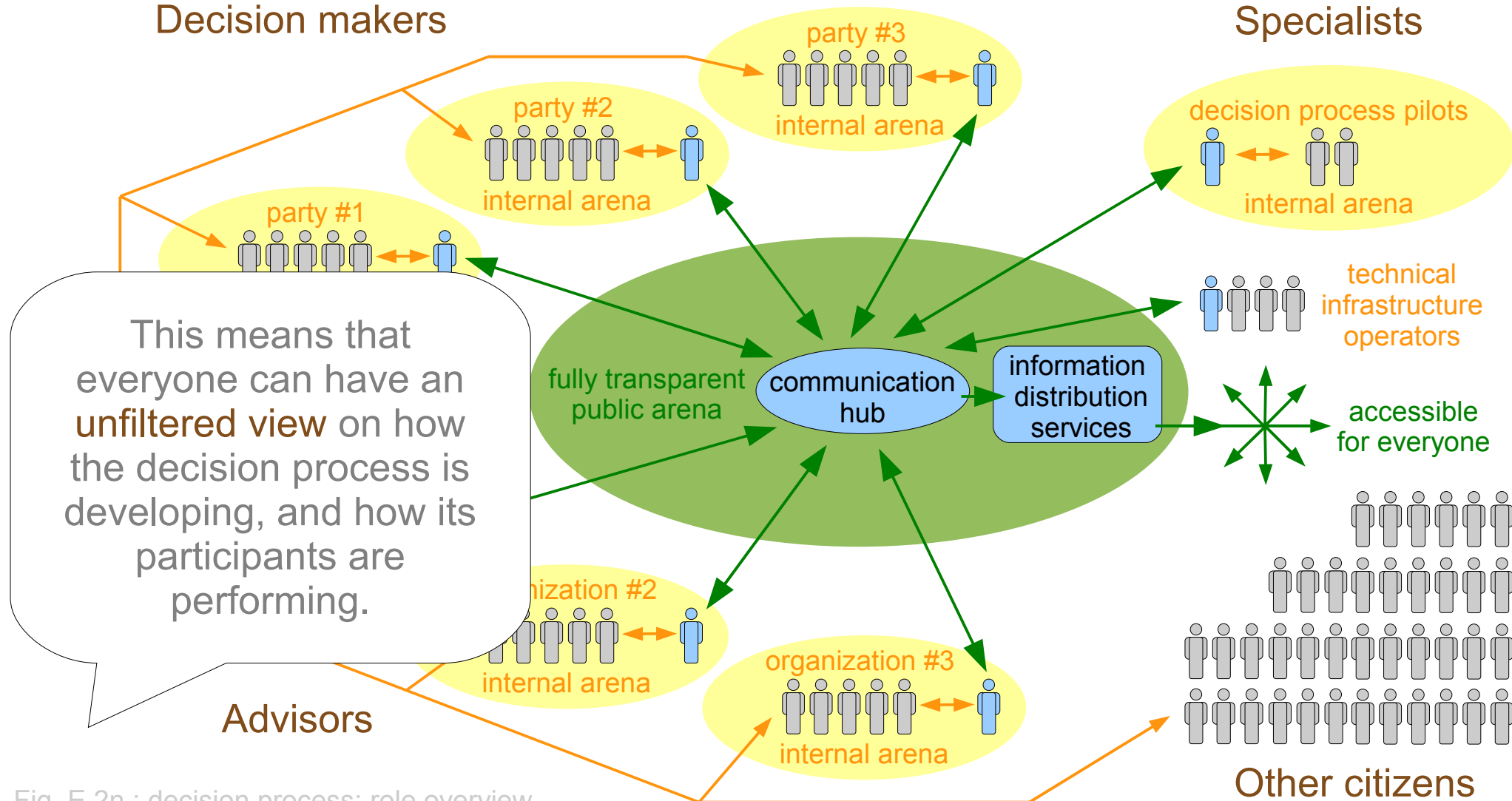


Fig. E.2n : decision process: role overview

Decision process: role overview

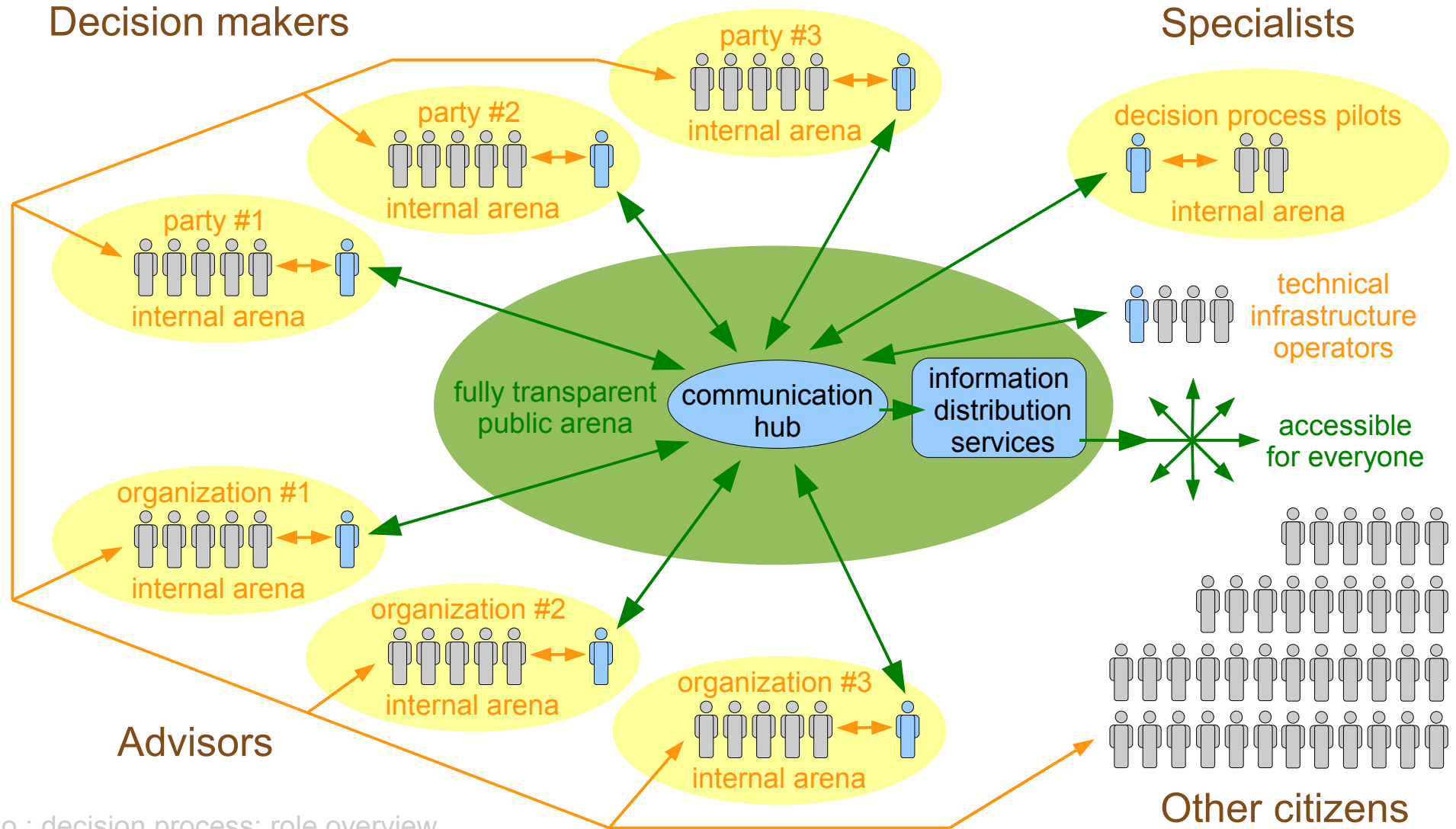


Fig. E.2o : decision process: role overview

Each spokesperson must agree to a **code of conduct**. This should be a single page document, containing statements such as:

'I will perform my duties competently and without delay'

'I will maintain a constructive attitude'

'I will follow the process communication protocol'

'I will respond to messages within 2 hours during daytime'

'I will express myself clearly, briefly, respectfully and politely'

The **decision process pilots** must agree to **additional** statements such as:

'I will conduct this decision process on behalf of the public, and in the best public interest'

'I have no personal interests or relations which may interfere with my duties'

'I have strong analytical, logical, and problem solving skills'

'It is natural for me to consider a discussed subject from several viewpoints'

'I know the difference between my views and the truth'

'I have a creative mind'

'I have strong visualization and presentation skills'

Each spokesperson must have a **deputy** who seamlessly steps in in case the original spokesperson becomes unfit for duty.

The deputies actively assist their spokespersons throughout the process.

Decision process pilots must be employed by an **independent foundation**.

Their salaries must not exceed 3 times the national average salary.

Anybody not content with such a salary is likely driven by greed, and therefore not the right person for this position.

More than
halfway
through.

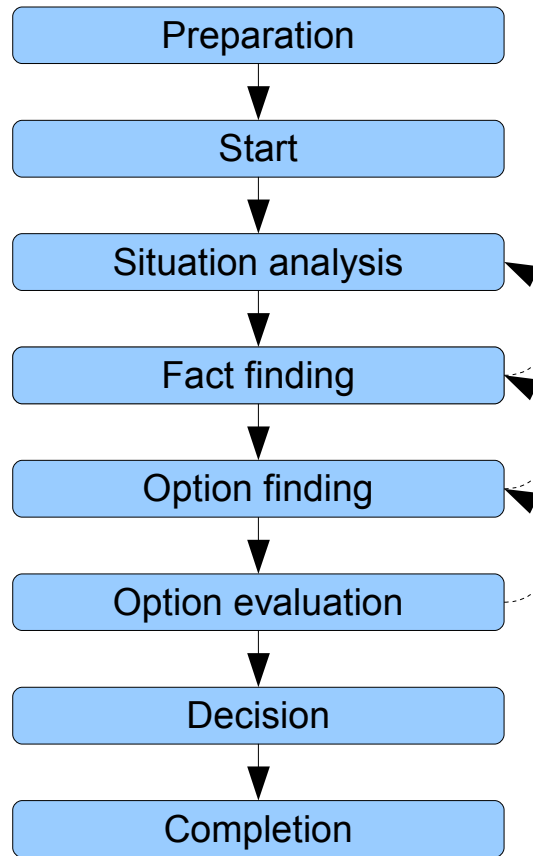
Progress

Intro	done
Design considerations	done
Digression into aviation	done
Design principles	done
Roles	done
Process	up next

Decision process overview

The basic structure looks like this.

The arrows indicate progress and possible iteration loops.

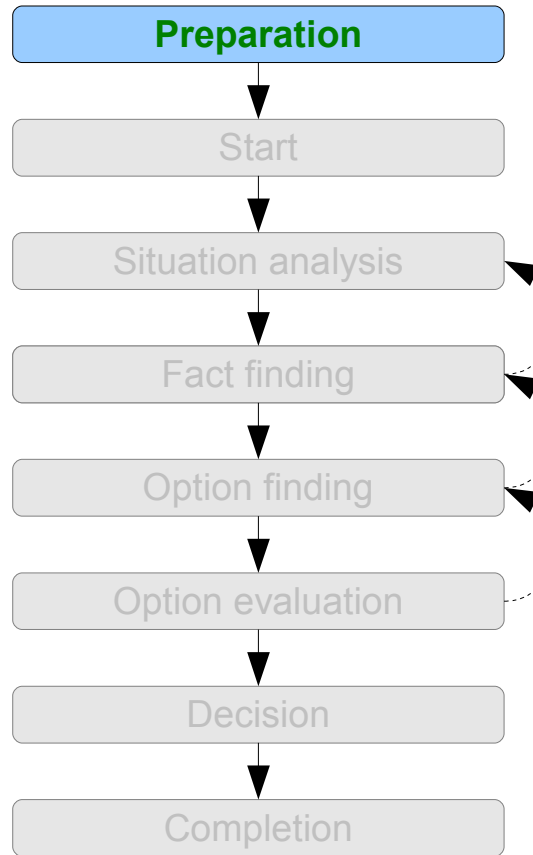


Each stage is briefly explained on the following pages.

Decision process overview

Either
the decision makers
wish to follow the quality
standard rules for the
upcoming decision,

or
a predefined trigger
condition (e.g. number of
affected people, budget
size) occurs, and **forces**
them by law to do that.

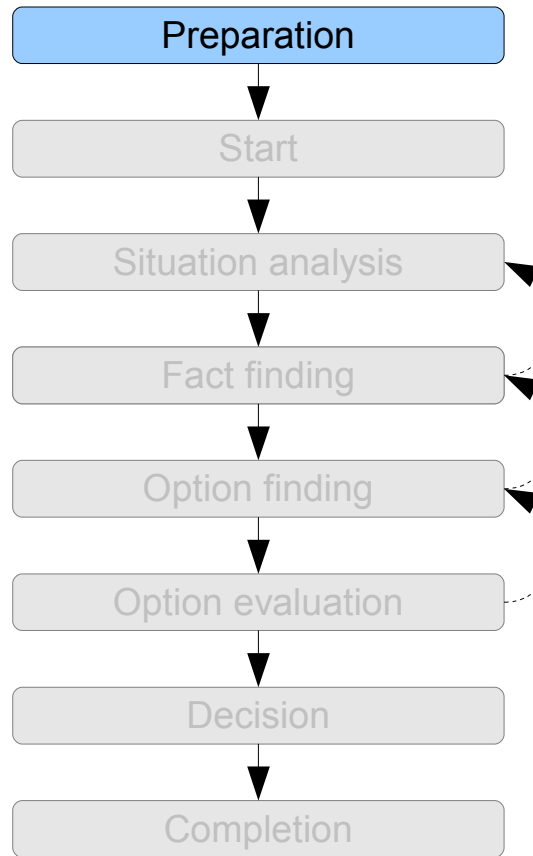


The decision making
parties choose their
spokespersons, who then
request a **decision
process pilot** from the
independent foundation.

The foundation chooses a
decision process pilot who
has **no personal interests**
in this decision situation.

Decision process overview

The party spokespersons and the decision process pilot choose their **deputies**.



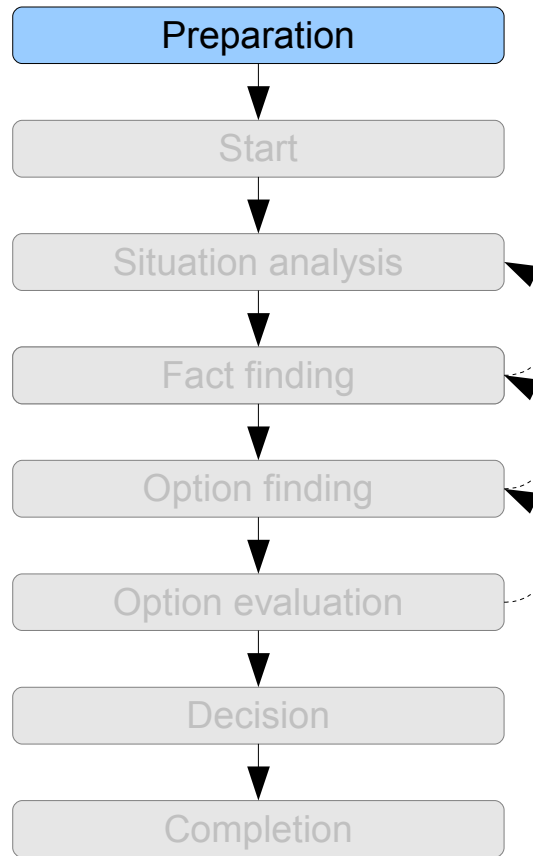
The decision process pilot chooses the organization that will supply the technical infrastructure.

That organization and the decision process pilot agree on a **Chief of infrastructure**, who then chooses a deputy.

Fig. E.3c : decision process overview

Decision process overview

The Chief of infrastructure takes instructions from the decision process pilot.



The Chief of infrastructure and his team make the **communication hub** and the **information distribution services** operational.

Fig. E.3d : decision process overview

Decision process overview

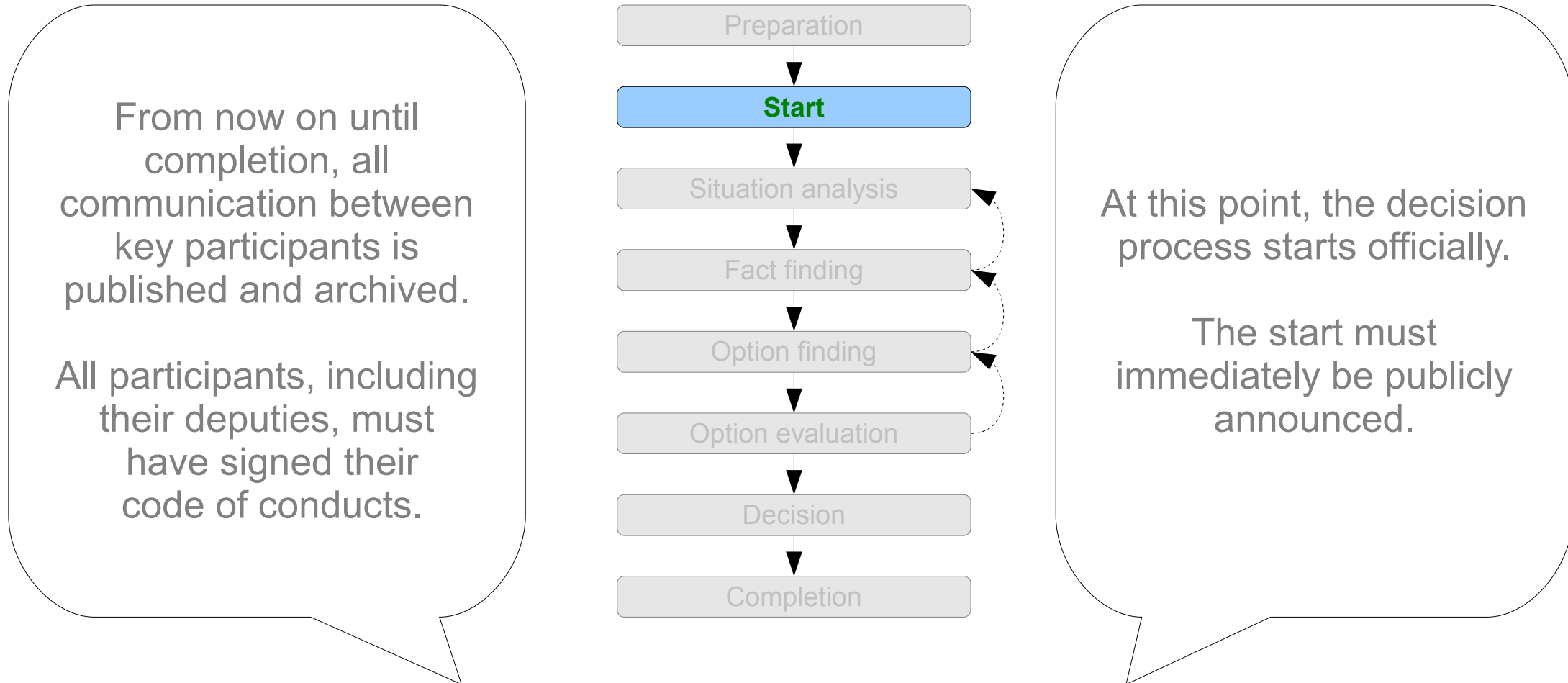
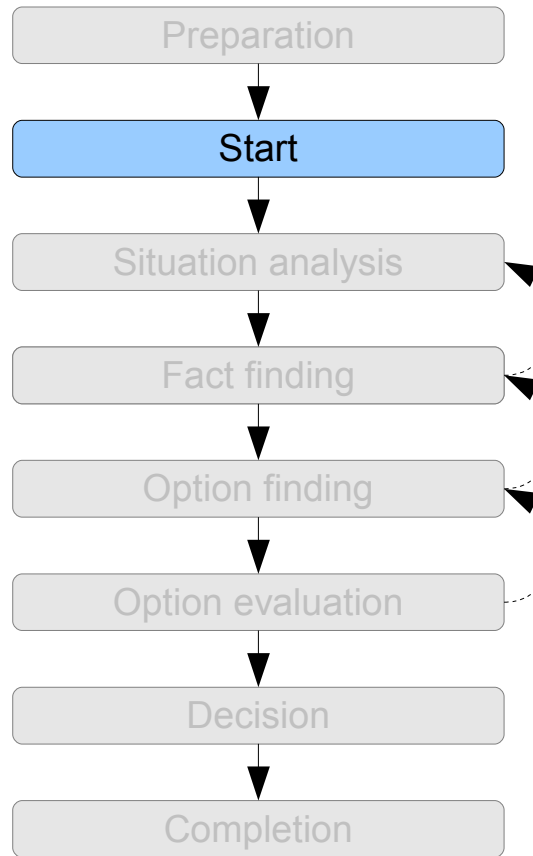


Fig. E.3e : decision process overview

Decision process overview

If the key participants are experienced and focused, they could reach this point in less than 1 hour (after the parties have nominated their spokespersons).

5 hours would still be good. More than 2 days would be reason for concern.



The decision process pilot will **invite advisors**, based on the party spokespersons' suggestions and own judgement.

The number of advisors should be between 3 and 10.

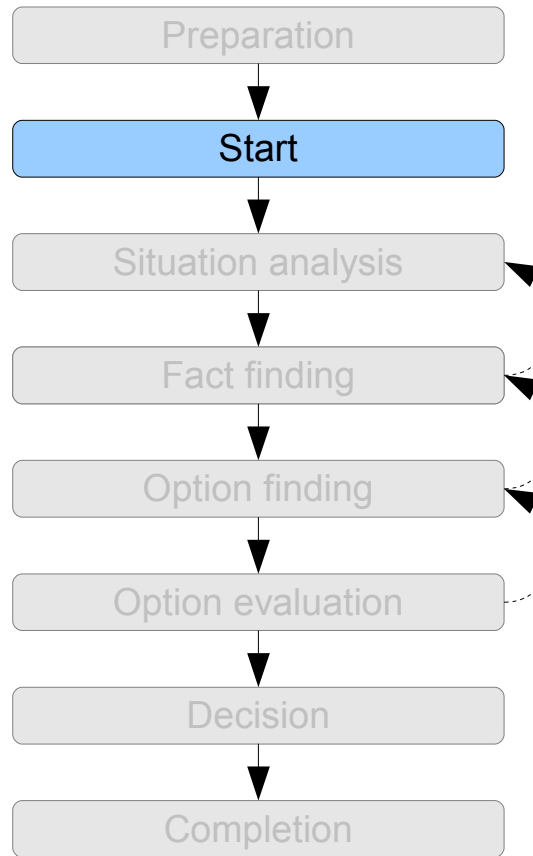
Also their spokespersons, and deputies, must agree to a code of conduct.

Fig. E.3f : decision process overview

Decision process overview

Please note that the decision process pilot has **authority and responsibility** for handling the next stages, with the exception of the 'Decision' stage.

(This may remind you again of aircraft pilots, or perhaps of maritime pilots who guide ships safely towards their destinations.)



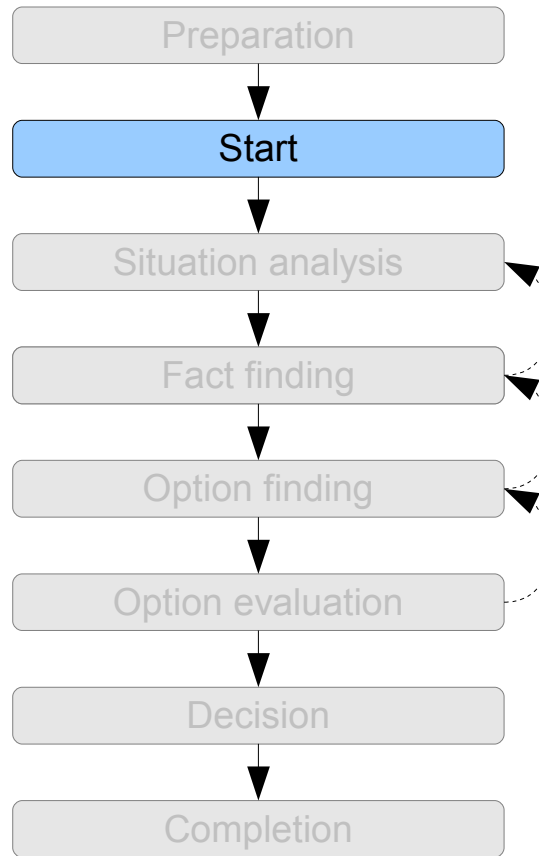
A decision maker could of course **refuse to cooperate**, thus violating the signed code of conduct **in public**.

The decision process pilot may then conclude that the quality standard is **breached**, or continue the process with the other participants.

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot will use quality standard **procedures** and **checklists** throughout the process.

On their internal arena, the decision process pilot works closely together with the '**co-pilot**' deputy and other team members (if any).

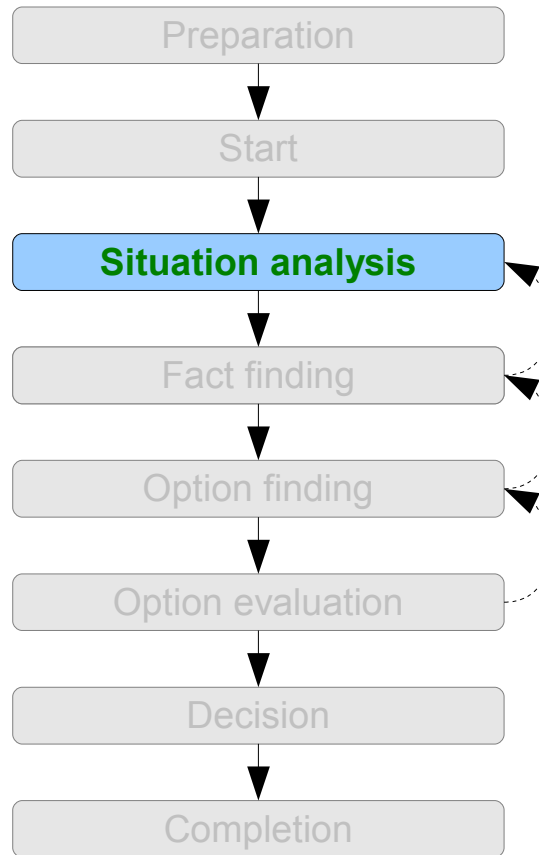


At least once per day, the decision process pilot will publish **status updates** via the information distribution services.

They provide a quick overview for citizens who don't want to read through the published communication log.

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot requests from all spokespersons their views of the situation, and compiles a brief summary.

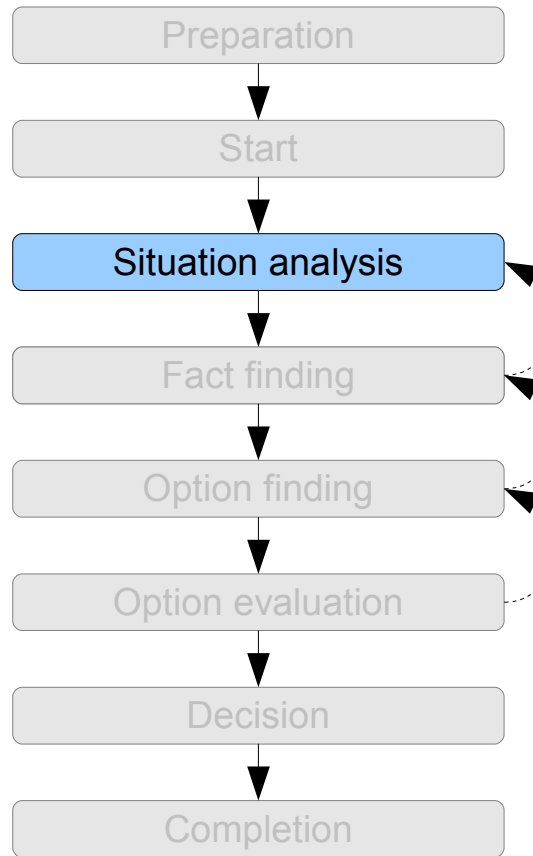


This summary must state **why** the situation needs attention, **what** the decision makers want to accomplish, and by **when** a decision must be made.

Fig. E.3i : decision process overview

Decision process overview

This stage can be completed within 1 day. More than 2 days would be reason for concern.



In case **studies** such as **risk assessments** are desired or required, they should be initiated as early as possible in the process.

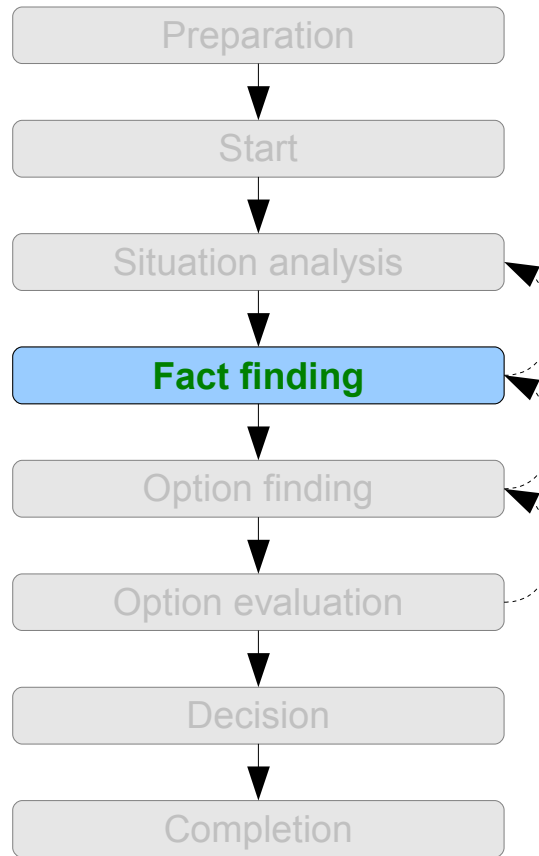
Their results must be available in time for the 'option evaluation' stage.

Fig. E.3j : decision process overview

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot compiles a **list of short factual statements**, based on the spokespersons' input and own judgement.

Then all spokespersons rate their agreement with each statement.



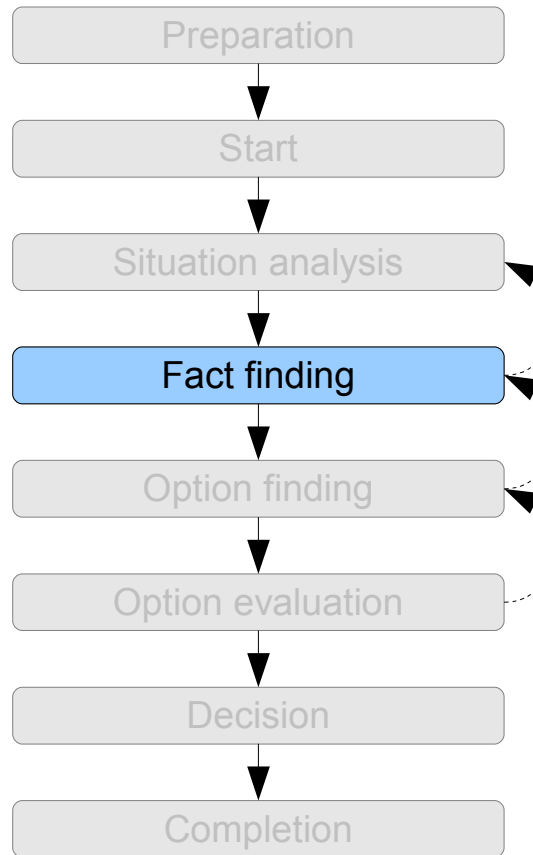
Hence it becomes clear **which facts are undisputed** and which are not.

Without this information the next stages could not be performed efficiently.

Statements and ratings are published as overview diagram.

Decision process overview

In case a participant now has a different view of the situation, the 'situation analysis' stage can be revisited for an update.



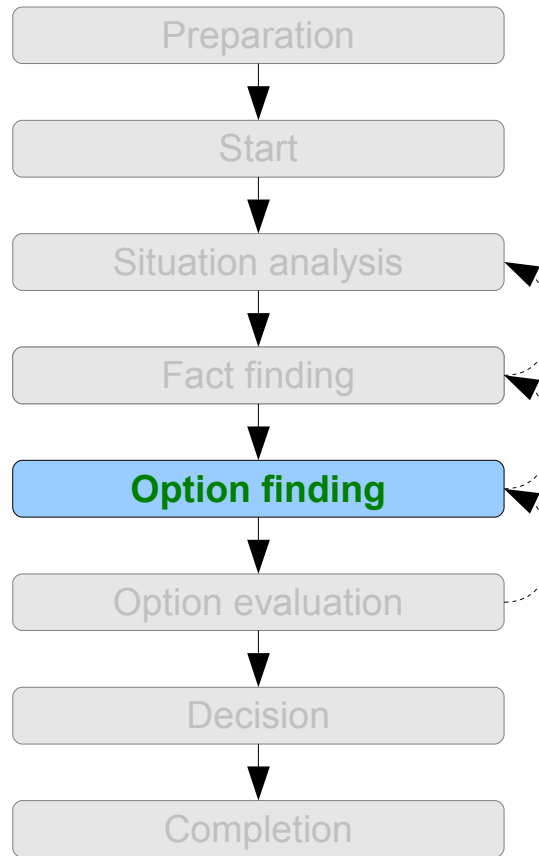
This stage can be completed within 2 days. More than 5 days would be reason for concern.

Fig. E.3I : decision process overview

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot requests suggestions from all spokespersons, and compiles a **decision option overview**.

This step normally needs to be repeated a few times. During these **iterations**, options can be modified, combined, added or eliminated.

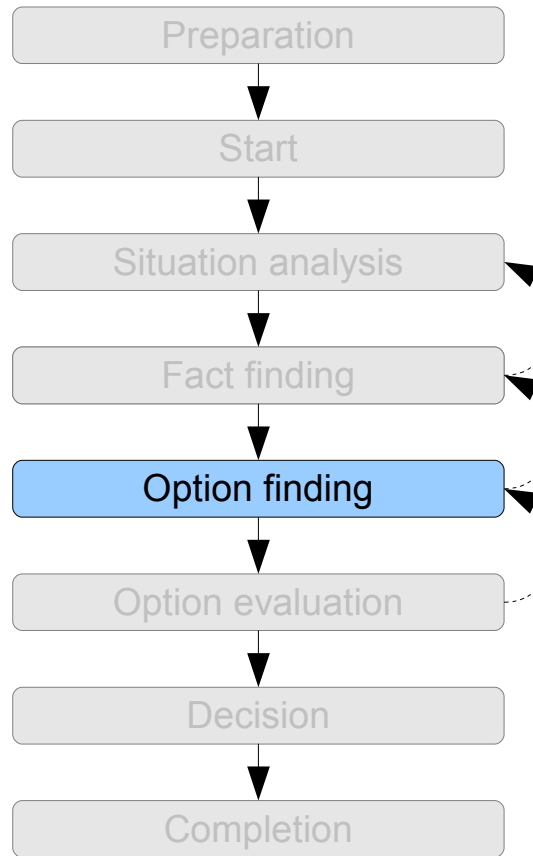


A 'maintain status quo' option must be included in the overview. It will later be evaluated just as any other option, thus serving as reference.

Fig. E.3m : decision process overview

Decision process overview

If necessary, the 'fact finding' stage could be revisited for an update.



Even in complicated situations, this stage can be completed within 5 days.

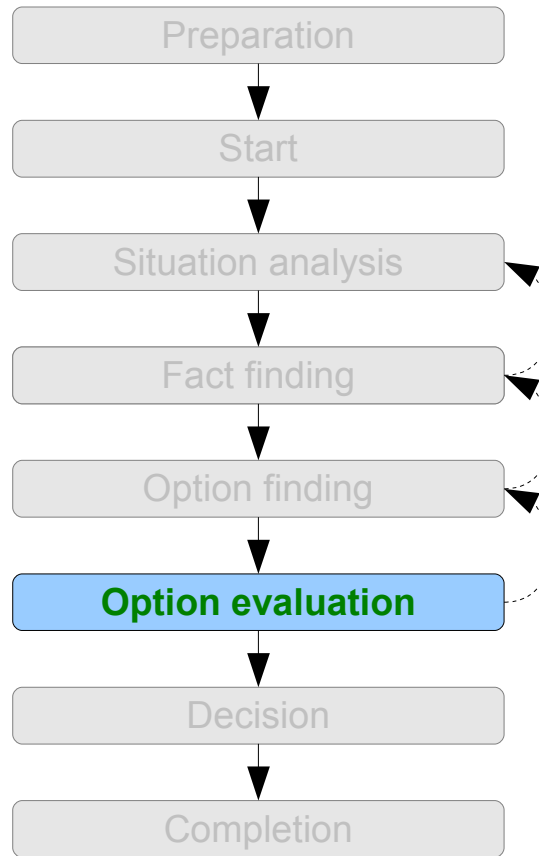
Note: that would be 35-50 working hours, for normally 10-30 key participants including deputies. Which equals 350-1500 man hours, not counting in any assistants.

Fig. E.3n : decision process overview

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot presents a **list of relevant evaluation criteria**, and requests the spokes-persons' comments.

This step normally needs to be repeated a few times. During these **iterations**, criteria can be modified, combined, added or eliminated.



However, the quality standard rules define (situation-dependent) minimum sets of **criteria that cannot be omitted**.

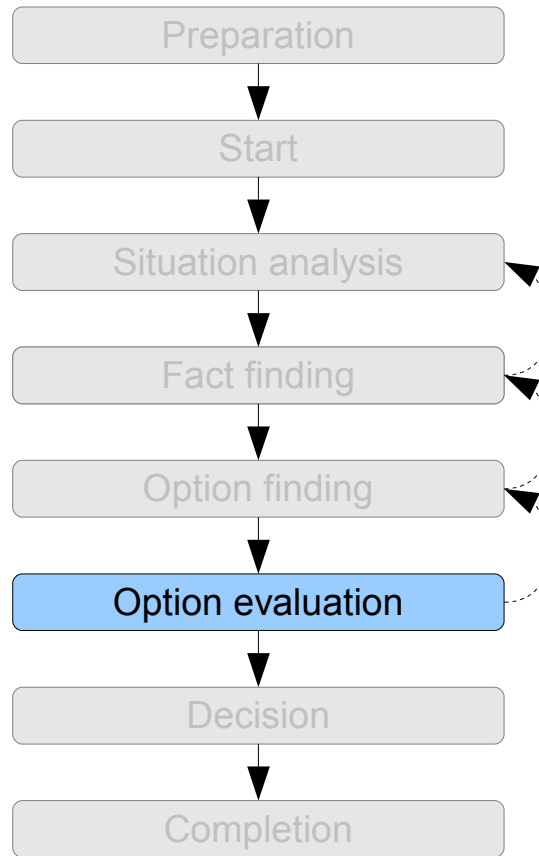
They ensure that the decision makers think through, and evaluate, the possible **consequences** of each viable option.

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot combines the criteria list with the already existing option overview.

The developing '**multi-party decision matrix**' diagram becomes the main tool for decision support.

(Please don't let that name scare you.)



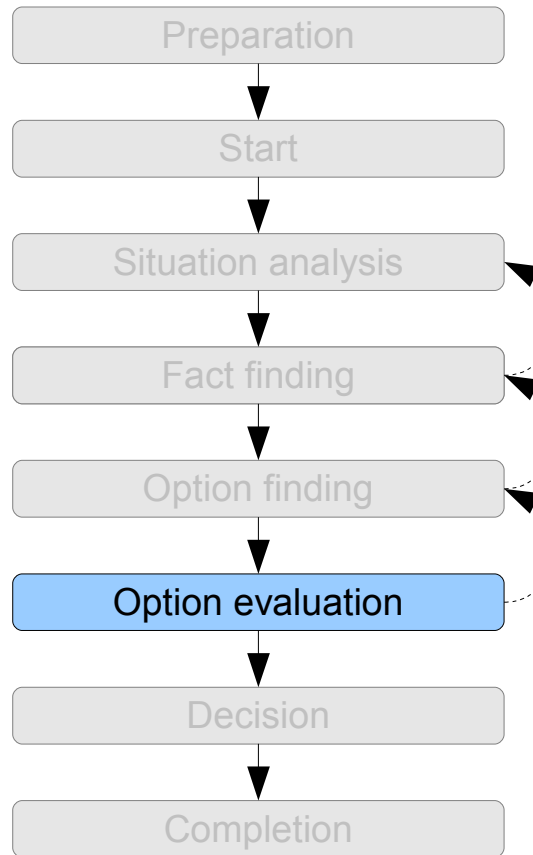
When completed, the diagram will provide a **visual comparison of all options**, and show how decision makers and advisors perceive their advantages and disadvantages.

(You can find details and examples in appendix F of the original book.)

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot requests each spokesperson to **rate** the available option/criterion combinations.

If such a combination gets a 'not acceptable' rating, the responsible spokesperson can **save time** by not evaluating this option any further.



These ratings reflect the specific **value system** of each spokesperson's party/organization.

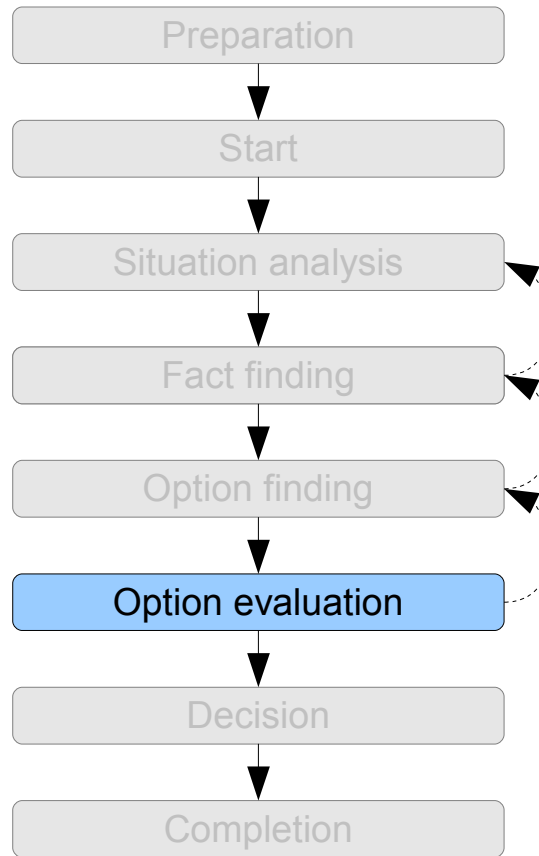
The updated 'multi-party decision matrix' diagram then **shows which options are acceptable (or not) for the decision makers, and why.**

Decision process overview

Note:

all this may sound very complicated. It isn't.

It boils down to that the spokespersons must answer a long series of simple questions (e.g. 'how do you rate option B's environmental impact?') ...



... using this scale:

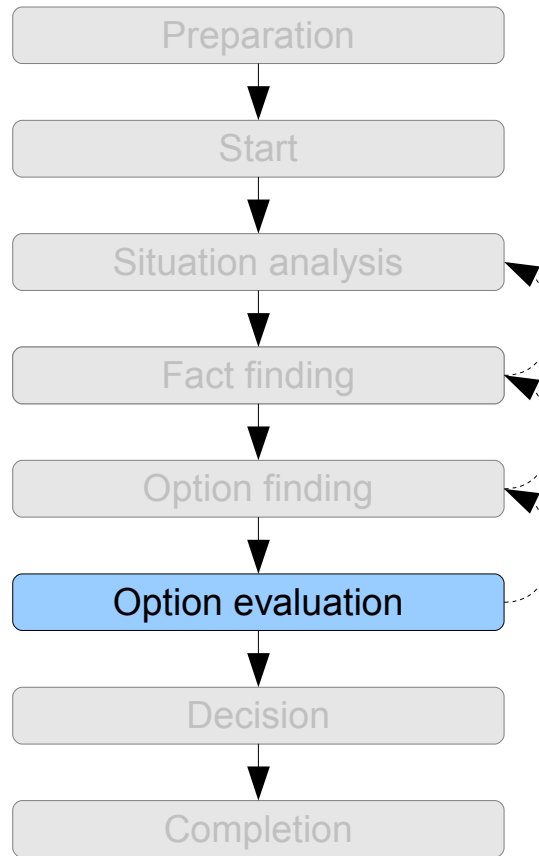
3	very positive
2	positive
1	moderately positive
0	neutral
-1	moderately negative
-2	negative
-3	very negative
	not acceptable

Fig. E.3r : decision process overview

Decision process overview

If necessary,
the criteria rating step
could be repeated,
and/or
the 'option finding' stage
could be revisited.

This would be the case
if no option is acceptable
to a majority of decision
makers.

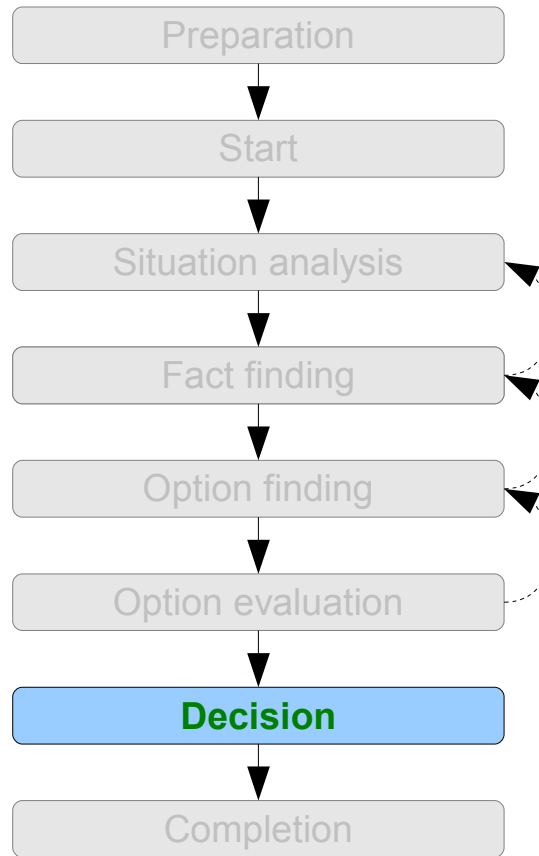


This stage can be
completed within 3 days.
More than 5 days would
be reason for concern.

Fig. E.3s : decision process overview

Decision process overview

The decision makers vote for their preferred option and reach an **official decision**.

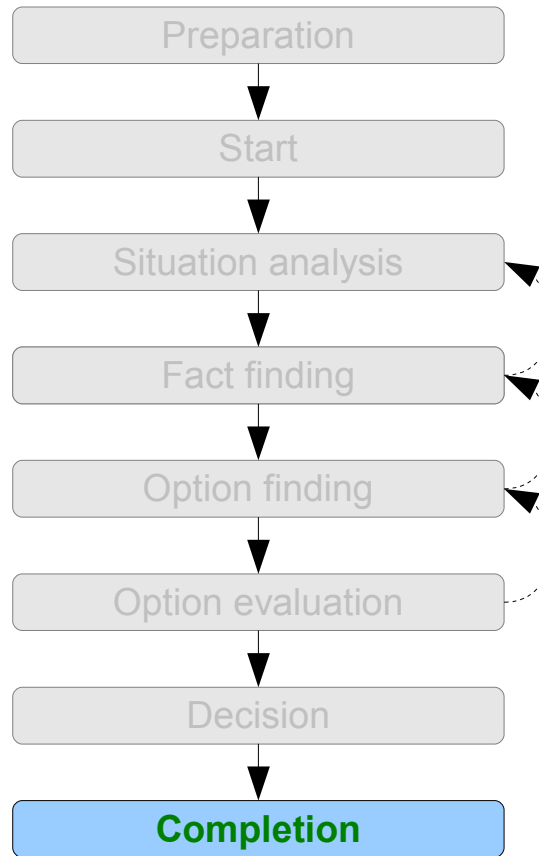


This stage can be completed within 1 day. More than 5 days would be reason for concern.

Fig. E.3t : decision process overview

Decision process overview

Each participant delivers a brief **review** of the process. All must state clearly if they regard the process as compliant with the quality standard.

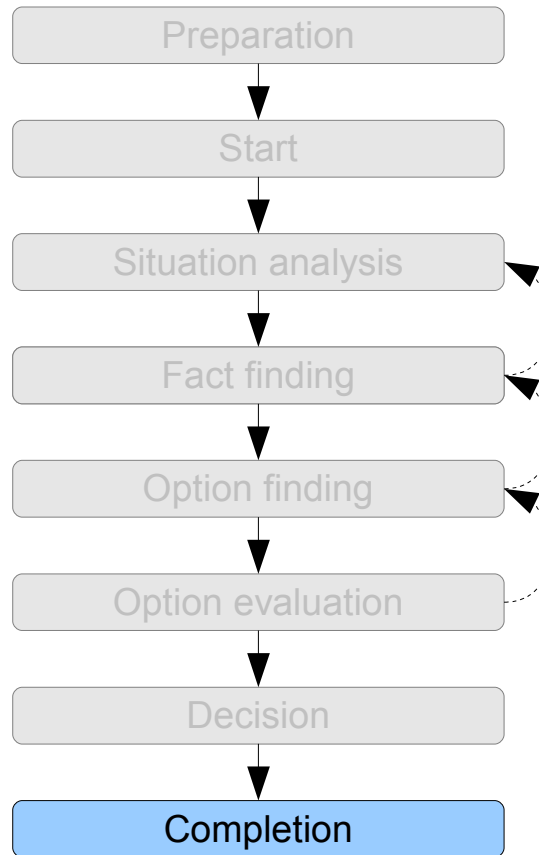


The decision process pilot and the party spokespersons **thank** the advisors for their contributions.

Decision process overview

The decision process pilot declares the process completed.

All published information must remain easily accessible for the public.



This stage can be completed within 1 day. More than 3 days would be reason for concern.

With competent key participants,
such a process can move **from
official start to reached decision
in 10-15 days.**

Even when starting unprepared, in
complicated situations, and without
taking questionable shortcuts.

Considering this, we can say that
the 'fast and efficient' requirement
is met.

As for the 'all hindering
factors must be counteracted'
requirement:

If you take a look at the overview
diagram in chapter 7 of the
original book (p. 103),
you will find that all counteracting
methods have been integrated
into the process design.

Critical readers may now also want to check if the remaining requirements from the 'Design principles' section are fulfilled.

(They are.)

So that's all good in theory ...

But would it work in real life?

Many quality standard details are not defined yet. A lot depends on these details. Just as in aviation.

If a 'faulty' detail is introduced into the final quality standard, or the decision process pilot is incompetent, the process will not give good results.

If such mistakes are avoided, or corrected after some testing, then it will work in real life.

So yes, it can be done, and it would make quite a difference.
For a lot of people.

(Better decisions, less problems.)

This is the last page
of this excerpt.

If you've read it: Thank you.